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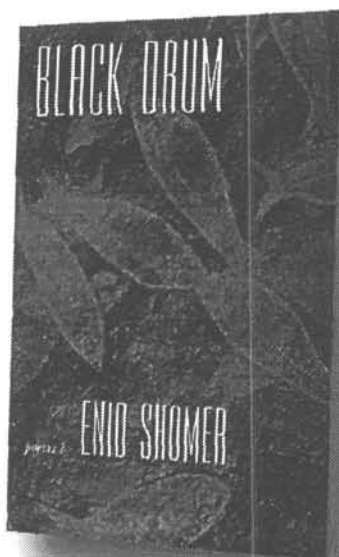
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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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Publication of this issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW is supported by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency. We wish to express our appreciation to this organization for its generosity.

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10021. It is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index and in the American Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Individual subscription \$24.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada \$28.00. Single copy \$7.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rte. 250, Milan, Ohio 44846-9705. Telephone orders for retail and wholesale distribution: 1-800-221-3148. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XLVI available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XLVI available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

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Printed in the United States of America. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE HUDSON REVIEW, 684 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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Letter of Correction

Dear Editors:

In my article, "Harold Bloom and *King Lear*: Tragic Misreading" (*The Hudson Review*, Volume L, Number 1, Spring 1997 issue), I included a quotation that I mistakenly attributed to Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* In fact, the quotation is from Tolstoy's pamphlet, "Shakespeare and the Drama," written around 1903 as an introduction to a work on Shakespeare by another author. The two works, *What Is Art?* and "Shakespeare and the Drama," were at one point published in English translation in a single volume, accounting for my faulty recollection.

Carol Iannone

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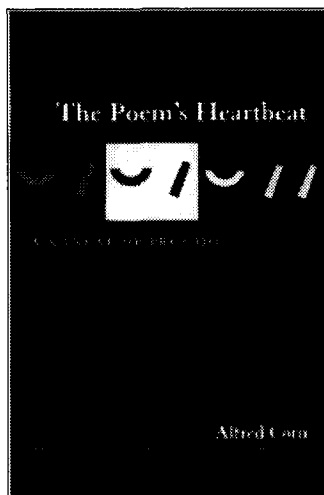
Comment:

Thoughts on a Dead Elephant

IN 1936 GEORGE ORWELL WROTE AN ARTICLE ABOUT HIS TIME as a colonial policeman in Burma. Called "Shooting an Elephant," its startling conclusion was that empires enslave the conqueror rather than the conquered.

Just fifty years after Indian independence, the year that sees the return of Hong Kong to China looks like a good moment to ask if he was right. Are ex-imperial powers like France and Britain stronger or weaker for having given up their empires? Or, for that matter, richer or happier? Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands count here too; so does the United States, it is easy to forget, since the independence of the Philippines in 1946. Theodore Roosevelt annexed it in 1898, as he admitted, because he had been impressed by Rudyard Kipling's poem on the white man's burden. So Orwell's thesis has now been tested to the limit, and beyond the wildest expectations of the 1930s. Even after the Second World War nobody believed that Africa would be independent before the turn of the century, and African leaders themselves neither demanded it nor expected it. The wind of change, as Harold Macmillan vividly called it, when it blew across Africa about 1960, was sudden and swift, and its effects in former colonies are widely studied. But how about its effects at home?

One thing at least is now clear. The imperial powers were not impoverished by decolonization. When the United States gave up its base at Subic Bay in the Philippines in 1992, it was replaced by an export zone, which may be the Filipino idea of a good deal, though the likeliest beneficiary of the change is the US taxpayer. Britain and France are richer today without empires than they ever were with them, by a lot, and when the Left in colonial times talked darkly about exploitation it missed the point. If exploitation means impoverishment, then it worked the other way around, and the gap between North and South is far wider today than it ever was in the imperial age. It is not exploitation a backward economy has to fear but neglect, and it is the colonial powers that failed to exploit their overseas territories, like the Portuguese in Africa, that have a charge to answer. The declining economies of some African states in the last thirty years through civil wars, corruption and lack of investment illustrate what hardly anyone now doubts—that the foreign investor bent on profit is not a curse but a blessing. That change of heart is widely reflected in a change of rhetoric. Little is heard nowadays about Neo-Colonialism or coca-colonization, and the surge of



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interest in the free market in Africa and South Asia shows that a lesson has been learnt. In the 1980s India began to privatize and open its markets, at much the same time as Mao's successors opened up China with their enterprise zones. Socialists had learnt, by experience, that socialism does not work.

Though I never shot an elephant, like Orwell, I can recount a less dramatic incident. When I was first in India, in the early 1960s, an official in New Delhi told me that the government of India no longer believed foreign investment threatened national independence. Quite the contrary. It is the big nationalized combines like the state car industry, he said, that are hard to discipline. The state can easily become more powerful than government, and whereas the managers of foreign firms obey at the drop of a hat and even, he went on with a smile, try to anticipate what government wants, state monopolies tend to be uncontrolled and a world of their own. In other words, nationalization can reduce the power of central government, privatization can increase it; and foreign capital, above all, it can increase enormously. That was the considerable discovery made by the Indian Congress Party which, in the heady days of Nehru's leadership, had long believed the opposite. A big state, they learned, can lead to weak government.

Orwell's larger point was that a colonial power, far from being in control, mostly has to do what the natives expect.

An elephant, he tells in his 1936 sketch, had gone mad and killed a Burmese coolie; so though it was very far from mad by the time he found it quietly munching grass on the edge of town, he felt obliged to shoot it to satisfy a watching crowd. A working elephant is a valuable property, as he knew. Nonetheless, he had to do something. "I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind." Many rulers since will recognize the dilemma, like Ronald Reagan when, with tragic consequences, he sent troops to Lebanon, or George Bush when he sent them into Somalia. There is always an elephant somewhere waiting to be shot, and the world expects you to act even when you know, or suspect, there is nothing useful to be done.

Such ugly dilemmas marked the imperial policies of Britain and France through the nineteenth century and long into this one. One had to do something, for example, or appear to do something, when General Gordon was attacked in Khartoum in 1885; or when there was an Arab revolt in Algeria in the 1950s; or when confronted in Indochina by the Vietcong, or in Kenya by Mau Mau. Sovereignty does not free your hands. In fact it constrains the imperial power. Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia were not United States territories and never had been, which gave Washington a certain freedom of action—a freedom to ignore a crisis which, in the event, it chose not to use. France, by contrast, had no such choice in Algeria. If a French government had abandoned Algerian sovereignty at the first Arab uprising it would have

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E PLURIBUS UNUM

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By Forrest McDonald

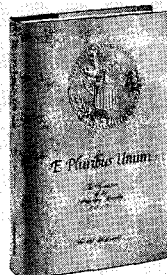
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started a civil war in France as well as in Algeria itself. There was an elephant that had to be shot, even if it was not worth shooting.

There are myths about the imperial era which, though perhaps weaker than they once were, still need to be examined.

One is that imperialism—or colonialism, to give it the name that largely replaced it in Third World rhetoric in the 1960s—was a single phenomenon to be dismissed by a single moral judgement, usually negative. That was only occasionally so. The Grab for Africa, it is true, was impelled by the power of fashion, and Bismarck, that wily cynic, is said to have believed in German territories abroad for no better reason than that France and Britain had them already. By the turn of the century colonies were something of a status symbol among the European powers, not excluding Russia, which was expanding eastwards towards the Pacific and southwards towards India. But there is no sense to be made of colonial history as a single event based on a single cause, like the quest for status or markets. Gibraltar has been a British colony since 1704 because the Protestant powers of the north, Britain and the Netherlands, resented a French Bourbon becoming king of Spain and upsetting a European balance of power. That has little to do with status or markets, and nothing to do with where we are now. Gibraltar, like the Falkland Islands, is a colony because its inhabitants wish it to be one. The British sovereign bases in Cyprus are there to help keep the peace in the Middle East, and they never had anything to do with making money. In fact bases cost money. India, it is true, was under British sovereignty—or at least about two thirds of it was, down to 1947—because of a search for markets. But it was principally the French whom the British defeated there in the mid-eighteenth century, not the Indians, and Australia was annexed in 1788 as a repository for convicts, while Malta only became a British colony in 1800 because the Maltese invited the Royal Navy in to get rid of the French. So colonies can be loss-making as well as profit-making, and some of the biggest profits can be made without annexation, as with the British (and later the US) economic penetration of South America in the nineteenth century. Those who once believed that empires were the last phase of capitalism, that they were all about making money, are now thinking again; and when you read that the British left India in 1947, you should recall that the number of British living there rose after independence and that trade increased.

Another misapprehension is that imperialism involved racial and cultural contempt.

I have often heard or read accounts of racism that insist that though no British imperial claims to racial superiority can be found, some such sense of superiority must have been felt. How else, and why else, would one quarter of the inhabited globe have been occupied? It is less often noticed that the largest acts of territorial conquest in the nineteenth century—the Russians in Asia and the Americans in North America—are not now usually thought of as imperial acts at all. Empire, in any case, can

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inspire admiration and leave a trail of affection. The ancient Romans never got over their sense of cultural inferiority to the Greeks they had conquered, and Britain and India today are bound by the deepest of cultural ties. An American I once met in India was amazed and faintly disgusted by the pervasive Anglophilia he found there, and an American lady I recently took to see Tom Stoppard's play *Indian Ink* in London told me that the play, though excellent, would not easily transfer to Broadway, since it is all about the profound cultural admiration of the British for India and of Indians for Britain. True, it is a very lopsided affection. Britain is full of Indian restaurants, and I do not know of any English restaurants in India. On the other hand Indians perform Shakespeare, whereas the British seldom, if ever, perform Sir Rabindranath Tagore. There are reasons for all this that scarcely need to be explained.

And then there is the Tom and Jerry factor. When you see a mouse fighting a cat, you naturally side with the mouse. I always do. But life is not like that, or at least not reliably like that. Sometimes the big guy is right and the little guy is wrong. Some of America's difficulties with Castro in Cuba have been caused, or intensified, by Tom and Jerry. It is easy, that is, if you watch the struggle from a distance, to suppose that the United States is bullying a small neighbor. The same misunderstanding dogged the ill-fated Anglo-French expedition to Egypt in October 1956, which was opposed not only by Washington and Moscow but, more interestingly, by General Franco, who perhaps felt some sympathy for his fellow-dictator President Nasser. In fact the French prime minister, a socialist called Guy Mollet, and Anthony Eden, the British prime minister, believed as men who had been young in the 1930s that the momentous mistake of appeasing dictators must not be repeated. There is abundant evidence that, rightly or wrongly, they were sincere in that belief. But what the world saw, or thought it saw, was two big powers attacking a little one.

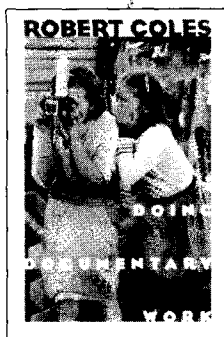
So was Orwell right? He shot the elephant in Burma, as he explains, simply in order to avoid looking a fool. Perhaps that sums up some graver decisions, like Lyndon Johnson's to send ground troops to Vietnam or Eden's to go into Suez. It is not necessarily a silly motive, and Orwell does not suggest that it is. Governments have to keep faith, at least some of the time, and they have to try to look as if they are not easily bullied. But empire raises larger issues.

Why be there at all? Nobody loves you for it, you are expected and even required to perform foolish and expensive acts, and you are blamed when things go wrong. The modern fashion for disengagement shows that Orwell's point has been taken. Overseas responsibilities, colonial or not, can weaken you at home and threaten your prestige abroad. In an age of Internet and intercontinental ballistic missiles, it would be misleading to call the new mood isolationist. A global economy leaves no room for isolation, and NATO is right to feel threatened



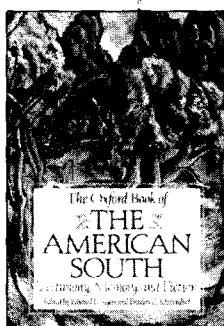
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whenever there is a war. But it may still be natural to prefer to sit at home and press buttons than to go.

There is another aspect to Orwell's paradox about the impotence of imperialism which he does not even hint at and which, even today, is seldom heard. I mean the depletion of a trained and creative workforce. The Indian Civil Service, in its heyday in the early years of this century, creamed off some of the finest intelligences of the British nation, year after year, to serve their working lives in a disagreeable climate in return for the limited advantages of tenured employment, an abundance of domestic servants and eventual pension-rights. France, being close to North Africa, sent out officials by the thousand to administer Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. It is hard to be confident about cause and effect here, but I suspect that France and Britain were culturally duller countries between the two world wars than they have since become. London was not then the theatre capital of the world or its finance capital, as it has since become, and its novelists were less widely known in the world than they are today, while in the 1930s Paris faded as a cultural center. An imperial involvement can help to make you dull, and if you send forth the best you breed, as Kipling once recommended, you are left with whatever is left.

There is another aspect of decolonization that is seldom if ever mentioned. London and Paris nowadays import intellectuals. Tom Stoppard, who was born in Central Europe, was schooled in India, Doris Lessing was brought up in central Africa, and it is common at London literary parties, especially late in the evening, to discover that everyone was born abroad. Paris is flooded with artists and writers from Eastern Europe as well as Africa, and its intellectual life often seems to be full of Romanians and Slavs. It would be brave to claim that France and Britain are more interesting, in their creative life, for being ex-colonial states, but it may be so. And nobody doubts they are richer.

So perhaps Orwell was righter than he knew. At all events his dead elephant will stay dead, America will not return to Liberia, or Belgium to Rwanda Burundi, or Britain to Nigeria, or France to Algeria, or Italy to Somalia. There is, as the saying goes, no percentage in it, and the local elites who loot their peoples in the intervals between civil wars are probably safe. In a deathless image Orwell describes how his elephant, which suddenly looked thousands of years old at the first shot, climbed slowly to his knees with the second shot and stood weakly upright, with sagging legs and drooping head. At the third shot, which killed him, he trumpeted for the first and only time. That sounds much like the colonial empires we once knew. But the elephant of empire will not rise or trumpet again. The audience has gone home, and there are better uses for the gun. The West will send medics and aid and as few troops as it dares. It will watch and trade and wait.

GEORGE WATSON

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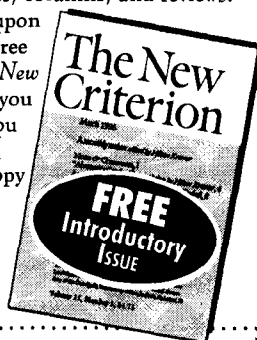
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BERT O. STATES

My Slight Stoop: A Remembrance

I was born on my sister's tenth birthday, August 8, 1929, at ten A.M., or thereabout, and in one way or another that has been the axial date of both our lives. For one thing, there were no other brothers and sisters to dilute our closeness, and we were far enough apart to miss the usual filial rivalries. But I think the most important thing was that the interval between us was a full decade, to the day. So as a result of these three factors alone we were drawn together, as it were, by the preciseness of our apartness. Of course I have no notion of what life might have been like had I been born on August 5th or November 21st or, say, seven years after her, instead of ten. But I am enough of a determinist to believe that small things eventually make incremental differences, and that each moment is a beginning from which no other future could possibly have ensued but the one that does. For example, it has always struck me that the single most consequential event of my life, in terms of pure yield, was my part-time job as a waiter in the freshman women's dining hall at Penn State in 1948, from which my own family eventually "ensued." I suppose you could argue that the *real* date was my coming to Penn State in the first place, or something even earlier, or not a date at all but my family not having enough money for me *not* to work, or my *not* being killed in a camping accident, had there been one, say, at McGees Mills in 1943, or finally just being born in the first place. All of this may be true, but it is somehow *endlessly* beside the point. Clearly, my life changed radically because I waited tables at Atherton Hall in 1948. Anyway, the idea is that unlike other pairs of sibling birthdays, which go leapfrogging asymmetrically through the years, my sister's and mine were perfectly synchronized, like the orbits of double stars, and could be chronicled on the same "binocular" scale: on the day I was ten she was twenty; on the day she was thirty-five I was twenty-five, and so on. So there was always something distantly mystical about

“our” birthday, and I can’t recount the number of times when a smile of disbelief came over the faces of people on first hearing about it; it was as if they’d been told that the cinema projector was invented, of all people, by the Lumière brothers (which it was). So the day belonged equally to both of us, wherever we were, and as a result we had all the advantages of identical twins and none of what I imagine must be the disadvantages.

And there are even subtler effects, including a certain factor of maternalism on my sister’s part that inevitably blurred the distinction between her and my mother. I arrived on my sister’s tenth birthday; therefore, her birthday must have had something to do with my arrival. Her birthday gave birth to me, as it were. In fact, for some time I was referred to as her birthday present, and in the lean “teen” years I cashed in on this by simply tying a bow around my head and presenting myself as a gift. So there is also the maternal side of it, and the reason why my mother and my sister were the co-figures of authority in my life. I can’t blame that entirely on the 8th of August, but that is where it begins, and of course everyone in the family promoted what was really this calendrical roll of the dice into a kind of family myth.

Another factor was that my father was a railroader and for the better part of my growing up years spent three to four days a week as a trainman on the passenger run between Buffalo and Pittsburgh. So he was an intermittent figure in my life to whom, I’m afraid, I did not do justice as an only son. I have many memories of him, most of them good or satisfactory, none really negative. He rarely scolded me or got angry, mainly, I suspect, because he was a sufficient stranger in the house to feel uncomfortable disciplining me. I was, he must have thought, my mother’s son. And I can see now how that must have been difficult for him.

I suspect this; I don’t know it for a fact because we never talked about such things and my father kept his emotions to himself. I also suspect that he must have felt at times that there was a slightly conspiratorial atmosphere in the household, owing not only to his status as the itinerant provider but to its being run by two very strong women who did pretty much as they pleased. Finally, though I didn’t learn it until much later, there were problems in the marriage, but that is a matter I don’t care to get into here. For the most part, my father simply took for granted what was done to or in the house in his absence—or in his presence, for that

matter—and he regularly came home to what must have been some difficult adjustments. For example, I know it disturbed him very much that my mother subscribed to expensive glossy magazines like *Architectural Digest*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *House and Garden*, and *Country Home*, along with dozens of others that were arranged, much as they might be at a dentist's office, in two neat rows down the sides of a huge new Formica coffee table that had cost the price of several months' rent. In those days, subscriptions were pedaled door to door by cheerful salesmen who knew exactly how to be nice. ("Good morning, Mrs. States. How is your father doing?") My mother knew all of them by name and since she loved nothing more than to be surrounded by pictures of beautiful things—the things themselves (beyond incidental accessories) being out of her reach—she was an easy touch for anyone selling an attractive product on a liberal installment plan.

So my father's complaints, when he made them, were feeble and tentative at best, or laced with almost imperceptible irony ("Oh, isn't that a new coffee table?"), and who can say what his thoughts must have been as he watched his salary being deviated into books filled with the colorful homes and gardens of the wealthy, to objets d'art like copper wall lavaboes, travertine busts of Eros, various pewter guinea hens and quail, and capacious ceramic ashtrays—or to educational "investments" like encyclopedias and, at one extravagant point, a complete set of the Harvard Classics (shelved in a dark mahogany bookcase) that was certainly never read and the bookcase almost never opened except when my mother hid money in it and then forgot in which of the fifty volumes she had put it. What had attracted her in the first place of course was the bookcase itself (though the word Harvard probably helped), that is to say an elegant piece of furniture which came in four rectangular units (the two matching shelf boxes, a foot pedestal and a veneer top) and had two up-lifting glass doors (with discreet brass knobs) that slid back into the case for easy access; and behind the glass you could see the two rows of blue linen spines of the books with all the titles embossed in gold. This bookcase stood prominently in the living room or hallway of whatever duplex we rented (we never owned a house), until my mother went to live with my sister in California after Dad died. At that point the books, most of them still unopened, were stored in cardboard boxes, along with everything

else she owned, in Kendra's warehouse in Punxsutawney. The veneer of the bookcase itself had long since buckled and split open and its legs were scarred and chipped by innumerable collisions with the bumper of mother's Hoover, and I'm not sure what ever happened to it. I remember going to Kendra's some years later on a trip from State College to settle the account. It was a huge high-ceilinged hall of a room with every unit of storage stacked as high and efficiently as possible and separated from others by those dirty padded blankets they use in moving vans. I'm not sure where everything ended up. The sofa and chairs, and probably the Formica coffee table, were given immediately to Mother's next-door neighbor, Esther Nicewonger, in her departure for California, and apart from some valuable personal effects the rest was sold to Mr. Kendra for a price that conveniently just covered the storage bill. The Harvard Classics, however, came into my possession, and I remember making periodic searches for two dollars Mother was said to have lost to one of the volumes. It wasn't the money of course; it was the evidence of her personality I was hoping to find.

I can't say that my father was henpecked; his authority was simply compromised by his double life and by the intimacy of a family that carved its way more or less without him through the years during and after the Depression. Looking back, I have the impression that he lived two separate lives, a little like Alec Guinness in *The Captain's Paradise*. It wasn't that the life at home was bad or intolerable. When he was home he was never excluded and I don't remember any serious quarrels beyond occasional loud words coming up from the kitchen at night through the floor register of my bedroom. But Dad did cheerfully whatever he was asked, and this amounted mainly to running errands and taking us all for a "ride" to the States farm (owned by his elder brother) in Sprankles Mills on Sundays.

It was, I imagine, my mother (or my mother and sister ganging up on him) who convinced him one afternoon in my fifteenth year that it was his duty, and the proper time, to explain sex to me. So the two of us suddenly got in his blue Dodge, for no announced reason, and drove out the Indiana hill road, he silent and ominous, I simply curious about why we were out for a ride and *not* going to a store, and finally after a brief warm-up ("How old are you now, Buddy?"), he said something to the effect that I

should be nice to girls. And I thought, *Here it comes!* And, within another sentence or so, without transition, he suddenly blurted out that I should keep my Jasper in my pants.

"You know what I mean?" he said.

I'm sure I nodded.

"Don't be dunking the noodle, Buddy," he added, patting my knee. "Don't be dunking the old noodle. You do know what I mean?"

"Ummm."

"That's very important. *Very* important. Girls are very very You have to be very careful. You can get in a lot of trouble." Pause. "Yes-siree-Bob. A lot of trouble." And he clicked his cheek with his tongue, as he always did when he had made a point.

My father, incidentally, came of solid farm stock and he had, in addition to an alert ear for sexual irony, an arsenal of sly euphemisms and metaphors I didn't appreciate until long after his death, some of the more colorful ones having to do with farting. (I've always liked to think that he learned these wonderful idioms when he was working as a roustabout for Cole Bros. Circus, a shadowy part of his life before he married my mother.) I suppose he had more to say that afternoon than I am recalling now, but I rather doubt he wanted to get into the biology part. Anyway, it wasn't hard to see that he was very nervous and aiming somewhere between a token lecture and a conspiracy of fellow males. And that was his way. I wasn't sure what my role was so I played the quiet listener and for the most part only grunted and looked out the window. The truth is, it was the silence of guilt, in thought though not in deed, for, even as he spoke, I was carrying in my wallet a single just-in-case-it-ever-happens Trojan rubber, its frayed collar by now peeping through the worn foil wrap, which I had snatched from the contraceptive drawer of Feicht's drug store one evening after hours when Indian Long and I were mopping the floor, as we did twice a week for seventy-five cents and all the ice cream and peanuts we could eat. At any rate, when our "talk" was over there was this air of relief in the car; something had been gotten through and, duty done, my father became jovial and began to whistle tunelessly, a trait I later realized I had picked up from him. I have visions of Mother getting him alone that same day and asking, "Well, did you tell him?" and Bert saying,

"Of course I told him," pumped up, as he so rarely had the chance to be, by the achievement.

So that was one Memorable Moment with my father. Actually, it was my second "official" exposure to sexual instruction. The first, a year or two earlier, was the pamphlet sent from DuBois (twenty miles northeast of Punxsutawney) by my Aunt Tina to "brother Bert and Helma" (my mother). Tina was an unmarried schoolteacher who lived figuratively and (almost) literally in the shadow of the Presbyterian church and she was the only college graduate in the family, on either side. Periodically, she would send news and advice from DuBois in the form of short two- or three-page letters on rose stationery with a small Jesus in the upper left corner looking skyward radiantly (in profile) from a florally entwined bower, and almost invariably there was a newspaper clipping having to do with one of her many church groups doing something beneficial. Once you got past the religion Tina was a kind and well-meaning lady, deservedly the shepherdess and chief historian of the States clan (my mother's side of the family is another matter), and we all liked to keep alive a rumor that she had once had an affair, hardly including sex, with a nameless man from Pittsburgh whom she had almost married. This of course was hearsay, pure wishful thinking. Anyway, Tina felt it her place to send little encyclicals now and then reminding my parents (and the parents of other branches of the States and Ross families living in Williamsport, Reynoldsville, Buffalo and Iowa) of certain rites of passage pertaining to "the children." This particular pamphlet (I draw a blank on the title) probably came separately from her church bulletins in a larger envelope, and probably with a brief note like "Thought the enclosed, dist. by the W. Pa. Council of Boys Clubs, might be appropriate for B. Jr." At least that would be in keeping with the frugality of her communications (I don't know that there *was* a Council of Boys' Clubs in Western Pennsylvania; but if there were Tina would know all about it). At any rate, it was simply given to me by my mother, without preamble, to "look over." It was a two-staple, surreptitious-looking affair of perhaps fifteen pages in large type that reminded me immediately of the dirty books that I was now and then fortunate enough to intercept as they made their way through the junior high underground.

The pamphlet was of course devoted to the topic of self-abuse.

But the only thing I remember about it is a priceless cartoon of four panels in which (1) a healthy knickered young boy and his dog are bounding in full joy across the world, schoolbooks flying behind him on a belted leash; in (2) we see him puffing slightly as he continues to run, having fallen behind others in his class (represented on the right-hand frame by a single sneakered leg kicking up dust); in (3) he is having real difficulty, throwing off exaggerated beads of sweat, like the characters in Mary Worth; at (4) he is virtually reduced to a crawl, bookless, dogless, all hunched over and hyperventilating, his rib cage visible from a loss of weight, and judging by the X's that had replaced his eyes in panel 3 he was going blind as well. And all because, as my father would say, he had been yanking his noodle-dandy on the side. I read it, there in the living room, in irrepressible shame (it had come *far* too late). But nothing more was said, and the pamphlet was very quickly withdrawn from view, and that's the last I saw of it—or heard about the topic. The matter was left, so to speak, in my hands, and the only consequence was that my guilt soared tenfold and I became much more circumspect about when and where I gave in to the demon. There are a lot of memories I would cheerfully erase but the pamphlet episode isn't one of them, and it would have been a find beyond all value to have discovered it years later in one of my searches of the Harvard Classics, tucked perhaps into the pages of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

One of my chores was to take my father's lunch to the station when the noon passenger train came through town twice a week out of Pittsburgh and then, coming back, out of Buffalo. My mother usually packed a couple of thick bologna sandwiches, or, if it was a Monday, leftover chicken (wrapped in stiff wax paper), a dessert and a piece of fruit in a brown bag, and I delivered it and spent the odd minutes with Dad while he set out the warning flare, boarded the passengers, and waited for the whistle to depart. What news I had was exhausted in a few sentences, and of course he had very little to share with me because his life on the road had nothing to do with anything I was remotely interested in. But he appreciated the time and he always gave me a dime or a quarter and wanted to introduce me to the train crew. To this day I see him as standing on the bottom step of the boarding platform in his dark blue uniform, waving as the train gathered

speed out of the station. Then, even before it was out of sight, I cut lickety-split down Farmer's Alley, through Barkley Square, and back into my own interrupted world, always, I am sorry to say, with the impression that I had lost valuable free time.

My father of course wanted me to pursue a career on the railroad. He had only a fifth-grade education, and my mother a fourth, or maybe it was the other way around. But my own education, to which he submitted at the cost of a good part of his unsteady earnings (on his retirement from the B&O on account of poor health, he became a car salesman for Altman's garage), was a major cause of the unreachability between us. For example, there was the afternoon on our front porch on Liberty Street when he and I were sitting alone. With my family I had come home from graduate school at Penn State. And he asked me, in an effort to make conversation, and to understand what I was doing, "What are you studying, Buddy?"

"English," I said.

In the silence I could hear his frustration. Then with a controlled anxiety in his voice that hovered somewhere between irony and real confusion, he said, "Don't you know enough English?" And I said something stupid, and suddenly it seemed stupid to be studying English. How could I tell him, by way of explanation, that I was taking entire courses on single poets, that I wrote long papers on dead people whose names he had never heard, all this while living on a ridiculous salary provided largely by Nancy's part-time job at the drug store in State College? This was simply beyond the vale of his understanding, especially when there were ample openings on the railroad for a bright young fellow willing to work his way up. So there we sat, continents apart, and slipping even further.

Finally, I must speak of my grandfather, my mother's father. Danny lived with us about twenty years, from the death of his wife to the end of his life in 1956. He was a strong muscular Swede, almost bald, who had left "the old country" at twenty-one and had never returned. The story is that he went to England for a weekend, got very drunk, and got on a boat to America, and never came back. I am not sure the story is any truer than the one about Tina's "secret beau" because even though Danny liked his whiskey it doesn't sound like his style to leave his mother Botilda unattended there in Sweden. There must have been an arrange-

ment or plan of some sort. Anyway, he settled in Rossiter, a village outside of Punxsutawney, where he was a blacksmith for the mines, and when he moved into town with us he was a blacksmith for the railroad or for the brewery. (There are no records, and I have no idea why either would need a blacksmith, but a blacksmith he was.) Toward the end of his life Danny gradually became poor-sighted and wore glasses with extremely thick lenses, giving his right eye, especially, a huge cyclopean effect. He smoked a pipe incessantly, or rather kept it in his mouth incessantly, and after his retirement he sat in a chair on the front porch during the day and in a special chair in the living room at night where he smoked and listened to Lowell Thomas. Every so often, when she was doing the dinner dishes, my mother would come up to him, drying her hands on her apron, lean over the chair close to his ear (he was also hard-of-hearing) and say, "How are you, Danny?" and he would say, "Oh, I'm fine," whether he was fine or not. And she would kiss his bald forehead.

Then she would ask, "Do you want another piece of pie?" whether we had had pie or not.

"Yes," he would say.

"Now?"

"Oh no."

"Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow'll be fine."

It never varied. It was always the same routine. And years later, when I was directing Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at the University of Pittsburgh this ritual came to me in an odd flashback during rehearsal one night. There is no explaining it properly, but between the play and the memory something fell into place that I couldn't name. Suddenly, everything gave away to this picture of Danny, at eighty, sitting in his chair and my mother leaning over him, with infinite love, and trying to bring him out of the past and out of the rapidly gathering dark. And I think what was so terrible is that I had seen this scene for so long that I had looked straight through it, without understanding what it was all about.

Gradually his sight got worse, but he could still see well enough to play cards. And it was my job on Sundays to walk him to the Eagles Club, which was about six residential blocks from our house through the park to Barkley Square on Main Street; then I would go on to the Sunday matinee at the Jefferson Theater, and

I'd pick him up after the movie at four. Most of the time, I was admitted to the card room, if the bartender on duty knew who I was (otherwise I sat in the lobby), and I'd wait there in the gloom until the last game was finished. What I remember most is that Danny sat there at a round felt table with three or four now faceless men in a captain's chair, one eye squinted shut and the cards fanned close to his "good" eye, a small bead of saliva gathering under the bowl of his pipe. The room was gray with smoke and the odor of stale draft beer seeped out of everything and you could still smell it on your clothes when you got outside.

I was eleven at the time, and I know this only because on the most memorable of these Sundays I went to see a new movie called *Swiss Family Robinson* with Thomas Mitchell and Freddy Bartholomew and looking it up in my *Movie Guide* just now I see that it came out in 1940. So I was eleven, and in seventh grade. This is one of those few movies I never want to see a second time (as, alas, I recently did another old favorite, *Gunga Din*) because its value depends strictly on its place in my life at that time. Now I would probably find it naive or technically flawed or over-acted—like *Gunga Din*—and another beautiful thing would unnecessarily be spoiled. No, it belongs to my "Romantic" period, to the era in which I read Robert Louis Stevenson and Albert Payson Terhune and I buried treasure (often fifteen or twenty cents) in the woods across the Mahoning Creek behind our house in one of the small metal boxes my father's razors came in. My main motive for burying the treasure in the first place was the excuse to make the map; and though I knew perfectly well where the treasure was located, it was necessary to make a complete map of the area, to show (in little houselike boxes) where the Hueys and the Scavas and the Eberharts lived (though the location of their houses had nothing to do with getting to the "X" where the treasure was hidden), and where the Penn Street truss bridge crossed the Mahoning, the location of the Punxsy beef slaughterhouse, Harmon field, the B R & P railroad tracks, and so on. Then I would fray the edges of the construction paper to make it look as if the map had been carried around in the vest pocket of a pirate. And I would hide the map in a cigar box behind a ceiling beam in the cellar. This is the same period in which I used to copy out medieval maps of the Atlantic Ocean with sea serpents swimming in great roller-coaster coils through scalloped waters, cherubim

with their cheeks spraying wind that drove potbellied schooners across the perilous unknown seas. This is the same journey that the Robinson family had made which to me was the ultimate escape to Paradise, and it all came to perfection in the magnificent tree house that protected them from the island's many dangers.

There are few things as desolating as coming out of a Sunday matinee to begin with, but stepping into the harsh afternoon sun after this experience left me with an ugly sense of something all wrong at the core of life. All the way back to the Eagles I could think only of that tree house which had even surpassed the splendor of the drawing I envied so much in my own copy of the book. *Why wasn't it possible to live like that?* And to make matters worse, as I walked along the memory kept slipping away in the glare and ubiquity of reality, and when I got inside the Eagles and sat down in the dark cavern of the card room, with the ceiling fan clanking, and waited for the game to end, everything seemed saturated with emptiness. I did not understand what had taken place between the movie and that moment; but it seemed to me that a secret and unalterable sadness had divulged itself in the world. Something that was always there but unseen and unfelt except at certain moments. This was my first recollection of an experience I was to have over and over, particularly on Sundays, and years later when I had taken a philosophy course at Penn State I actually gave it a name, inspired, I must admit, by Proust's passage about the "asymmetrical Saturday": I called it "the existential Sunday."

As if to confirm this "fact of life," there was even a song that was popular about that time called "Gloomy Sunday," and one verse went

Sundays are gloomy, with shadows I spend it all.
My heart and I have decided to end it all.

I never thought seriously about ending it all, but I can understand why Sunday would be the day to do it, if you were at all inclined that way. The thing about Sundays was, and still is, the complete suspension of the laws governing daily life. Everything is half dead on Sunday ("Sunday is viscous, with torpor I spend it all . . ."). Sunday was a hollow parenthesis in the week, a day whose festivity

was compromised by church in the morning, homework in the evening, and the long shadow of the school week ahead (including math with Miss Coleman and Latin with Miss Brown). Sunday was a solemn preparation for the descent into Monday. There was simply something wrong about Sunday, and I blamed most of it on God.

A few years later when I had moved onto the main campus I used to hitchhike to Punxsutawney on weekends and then back to State College on Sunday and I got to Jordan Hall late in the afternoon. I didn't at all like life at Penn State in the first year (my junior year really) because I had a girlfriend back home and every weekend I went home, snow or rain, a seventy-mile hitch across the Allegheny Mountains. As a consequence, my return on Sunday was the low point in the week, and it was just like a prolonged emergence from the matinee into reality. My room was on the fourth and top floor where the walls sloped into the ceiling, mansard style, and the only sources of natural light were two thin dormer windows with deep sills on which my roommate and I piled our books. When I opened the door this same lugubrious emptiness always overcame me. There were the two single beds, the two facing desks and two desk chairs, two reading chairs, two lamps, two closets, two ashtrays, two of everything, just as I had left them (my roommate always got in later in the afternoon), and the waning sunlight slashed into the room onto the throw rug and up across the beds, illuminating everything with this terrifying indifference. I imagined the room to be expecting me, as if everything in it had conspired to be alertly itself when I opened the door, like people hushed together for a surprise party. All of the things sat there in their places smirking at the inevitability of my return: "Welcome home! We're still here, just as you left us." So it seemed to me the weekend had simply been short-circuited and I hadn't left at all but had only gone down the hallway to the bathroom, and all the rest of it was a false memory. This is how the idea of the existential Sunday was born, one of the gloomier fruits of my education.

"What are you studying, Buddy?"

"I'm studying existentialism."

"I see."

But it was my mother who ran the family and it was my sister

who ran my mother—on most matters, though not by any means all. And they had some colossal fights. In addition to her intelligence, my sister was also overwhelmingly convincing. It was my sister who began the campaign for my going to college and it was Mimi, my mother, who passed the decision on to Bert, my father, whose dream of my following in his steps ended in the fall of 1946. I must add that this was in no way a coercion on my sister's part, but a mutual understanding and a realization, somewhat new in the world in those days, that an education was the only ticket out of town, unless you went to work in a factory in Buffalo or Cleveland. The new undergraduate center in DuBois had just opened and the veterans were coming back on the GI Bill, and it was suddenly an ideal time to think the unthinkable. And thus began ten additional years of education, interrupted by two years in the army. In 1989 my sister presented me with a thick volume of family photographs, beginning with our great-grandparents (including Botilda Hellberg) and coming up to our own generation. Each photo was identified and amply documented to the best of her memory, and her introduction began with these words: "When you came into my life on my very own tenth birthday, it was required of me that I keep track of you. This pictorial manuscript is my own version of your track record."

And that was my sister Lois, the organizer and attendant of the family fortunes, especially my own. In an odd way, she assumed the role vacated by Tina, who died in a Clarion sanitarium following eighteen voiceless months in a coma, staring straight at the wall from a wheelchair, according to Aunt Winifred (Ross) who tended her. I have never known anyone, besides Tina, who "kept track" of everybody on the family tree as carefully as Lois did. She was far more interested in the lives of those around her, even those that touched hers only casually, if at all, than she seemed to be in her own, and she liked nothing more than a good story or an anecdote about someone, it didn't matter who, to whom something interesting had happened. And she would always ask for follow-up stories when we had our usual phone conversations on Saturday morning following our move to California ("Have you heard any more about—your friend, what's his name?"). It was a joy to tell her these stories because I had the sense that she lived them in somewhat the way that my mother lived the photos in her magazines, and the telling was always

punctuated by her “Ohhh!”s or her laughter or sympathy, as the case required. Where her own pain is concerned she was, like my grandfather, virtually Stoic and when her eyesight was all but erased by macular degeneration she immediately plunged into active membership in the White Cane Gang, and the activities of the “visually impaired.” She wore her blindness like a badge, or as she would put it, she got all the mileage possible out of it.

From the time I was fifteen until my own family moved to California in 1978, our relationship, except for annual visits, consisted of phone calls and letters. On one of my recent visits to Monterey we were sitting in the living room. Then she got up, went into the bedroom and presently came back with a 10" × 12" box perhaps six inches high.

“These may interest you,” she said in a husky whisper, putting the box in my lap.

My sister, to put it generously, was a large woman (like my mother), age seventy-three at this point, afflicted not only by the macular degeneration but also by diabetes, severe leg cramps, hypertension, swollen feet, obesity, and a deathly fear of losing a limb to gangrene, as had our mother and her mother before her.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“These are your letters,” she said. And there (apparently) were all the letters I had written her beginning in the mid-nineteen forties when I was a senior in high school and she was twenty-six and a medical secretary in Ontario, California. “You ought to have them.”

I didn’t know what to say. “Well, they’re really yours.”

“I can’t read them anymore, and you can. You should. There you are. *There* you are!” And she slapped her knees as she sat down. “You can watch yourself growing up.”

“Well, I don’t know that I want to do that,” I said. “Once is enough.” I suddenly felt very strange. The prospect of reading my own letters seemed to me about as interesting as hearing one of my lectures played back on a tape recorder. In fact, just having the letters there on my lap aroused a vaguely ominous feeling of being confronted with something I had “done.” I was also astonished at the size of the stack and at the idea that she had patiently collected the letters, saved them in the order of their arrival, from the very beginning of our correspondence.

“Well thanks,” I said. It was a flat moment and I was aware that

she wanted it to be a big moment, but I could think of no way to manufacture any delight or even a sincere thank you.

“Oh come on,” she said with some indignation, “surely you’re curious.”

“Not very.”

“Not a little?”

“Well . . . I’d rather read someone else’s letters. Yours.”

“Oh, you’re so damned unsentimental.”

“Only about some things,” I said, now really on the defense. “I’m not sure I would like myself.”

“This is your history, for god’s sake, right there in your lap—or a big part of it.”

And then we got into a minor skirmish on the general theme of my “objectivity.” It shortly broadened to why I don’t go to my high school reunions, or go back to Punxsutawney, and so on. My coolness, I must confess, was also based on even more urgent concerns, for I realized that if I wasn’t careful I’d shortly be asked to read one, if not several, letters aloud to her, and to whoever else was in the room, and that would have been a debacle. But I dodged that bullet at some cost and she remained, I suppose, permanently (if she thought about it again) disappointed that I took so little interest in my “own past.” It so happens that I opened the box just a moment ago—it is now late 1995—in order to find out when the series began because I hadn’t really looked at the contents. Maybe my point of view will be clearer if I quote the first paragraph of the earliest letter, which I have just perused and which lives down to my expectations. It is dated March 12, 1946, from Punxsutawney, Penna., written (by hand) only a few weeks after Lois had left Punxsutawney for California—forever, as it turned out.

Hi Sis,

It’s strange, indeed, writing to you so far off. I don’t quite know how to begin. I could start out with the old “How are you?” routine, but that’s just commonplace and I mustn’t forget, I’m not writing to a commonplace gal! right?

I hope you are feeling alright. If you’re not, I can only say that you’ll become acclimatized—I hope!

That is painful. I thought about not including it but decided in the end that it was crucial “evidence.” For what I want to say would

be meaningless without that little fragment of my past. I can only assume that I got better as the series went on, or at least had better control of the march of ideas and sentiments down the page; on the other hand, this letter may be the most innocent and uncontaminated of the lot. I will probably never know because the thought of stumbling through this history of enthusiasms, discoveries, world-weariness and existential Sundayism is simply too disturbing to think about. Kierkegaard once said—"Here he goes," my sister would say at this point—that the ironical thing about life is that you live it by going forward but you understand it by going back over it. Well, yes and no. It is one thing to try to understand life, even by going back over it in your memory and thoughts about what it may have amounted to. It is another thing to return to the artifacts you cast out while you were living it, to see that what you took as your own spontaneity was an infinite series of conventional choices or unconscious adaptations of attitudes, fears and intolerances that are shared by almost everyone. It's one thing to look at an old photograph of yourself, another to read the record of what went on in your head. The box of letters is probably the most complete record of my personal mental life that exists. I get a spasm of self-allergy just thinking about all the convictions and genuinely sincere beliefs that must be waiting there in these pages as the new world of college, then the army, my first trip overseas, then graduate school, and finally university employment, opens up new avenues of experience.

In literary studies there is an honorable endeavor in which scholars use various techniques for identifying the "hand" of an author through stylistic devices. If you want to know whether Shakespeare wrote a certain play or poem, or passage in a play he *didn't* write, you can submit it to an analysis of such things as frequency and kinds of metaphors, the recurrence of words in the known Shakespearean vocabulary, tendencies to use various figures of speech, things like catalogues, anatomies, or certain organizational devices, sentence patterns, word inversions, and so on. (How many times, for instance, does the figure hendiadys or zeugma appear?) In its way, it is the literary equivalent of finger printing or DNA analysis. This becomes more interesting when you consider that what one is really uncovering is evidence of individuality, of the "genetic" stamp through which a particular mind unthinkingly speaks itself, since style, good or bad, is

something that expresses itself independently of conscious will. Style is really what you don't know about yourself.

For example, I recall a colleague saying to me one day, very pleasantly, that he missed seeing me on campus (I had been on leave); more specifically he missed seeing (I think it went) that "shock of grey hair and that slight stoop." This went through me like a meat hook. Stoop? What is this about a stoop? I thought. No one had told me about a stoop. Jesus, I'd been going through life with a slight stoop. I can be *identified* by my stoop, a sort of walking parenthesis—topped by a "shock of grey hair." I've never forgotten it and when I happen to think of it in public I straighten up to a point that must strike others, if they noticed, as an unnatural rigidity, as if I'd just had a cramp, but before I have gone half a block I have fallen back into my emblematic stoop. And invariably, this recalls the myriad of instances in which my mother would sneak up behind me, put her large hands on my shoulders and pry them backwards with her thumbs in my spine, as if I were one of those rabbit carcasses I can still see her splaying during the hunting seasons when we lived in Albion: "Keep your shoulders back, Buddy. Don't slouch." So there was the evidence, early and late, that the stoop had developed into a lifelong characteristic I knew nothing about. And when you compound my stoop with innumerable other gestural or physical habits I *still* know nothing about—it just seems better not to think about it.

So there is something about style that is the most personal of personal things. In a certain sense, it should be left to itself, unremarked upon, like the habits of the body, and taken for what it is: an overall unconscious manner of self-presentation. What a nasty thing, for example, to say to someone, "Do you realize how often you say, 'I'll wager that—'?" or "Why do you always flick your nose with your knuckle?" Or, had my friend (who meant to pay me a compliment) said, "Did you know you walked with a slight stoop?" These are subcutaneous matters. No one likes to have involuntary habits pointed out—unless, of course, you say something borrowed from the language of lovers, like "You have such a cute way of raising your eyebrow," or "I've always loved your snicker!"

Now then, to come back to my letter of March 12, 1946, which is probably the earliest surviving letter in my "hand," consider the evidence for authorship. Take the opening sentences: "It's

strange, indeed, writing to you so far off. I don't quite know how to begin." Once past the sense itself (what there is of it), what leaps out at me first is the word "indeed." Even now, reporting all this "objectively," I wince. Here it is, 1946, I'm a senior in high school, the feature editor of *The Hi-lights*, winner of a state prize for high school feature writing, and my letter is no sooner under way than out pops this "indeed," like a pimple, and it is followed in the shadow of the same sentence by a "quite"—two affectations I had picked up god knows where, and to this day I have to be constantly on the lookout for them because they are always poised ready to pounce into my prose by way of making a point stronger that doesn't need to be made stronger: indeed, a point that would be stronger if no attempt were made to make it stronger! (For example, how much better, how much *more* powerful, is: "It's strange writing to you so far off. I don't know how to begin," or leaving out the "I don't know how to begin" altogether, since all it is doing is gathering dust. Which would leave only one error in grammar, but at least it's off and running.) "Indeed" and "quite" are what linguists call emphatics and an addiction to emphatics is the equivalent of constantly waving your hands while you talk, or peppering your speech with "you knows" and "likes," or flicking your nose with your knuckle, or walking with a slight stoop. It isn't really that I *dislike* what I am, or have become; it's mainly that there is this part of the self that one has nothing to do with choosing, and that somehow *what one is* and how one behaves seem more visible in these unchosen stylistic details, these excesses, these innocent gestures that degenerate, if not tended, into proclivities and thence into self-caricature. So I encounter this "indeed" and this "quite"—thereby, in a weary attempt to escape the "commonplace" falling straight into it (and how *badly* the stylist who wrote this letter *detests* the commonplace!)—and I see the genesis of a tic that couldn't have been more than one or two years old at the time, now well into its metastasis. Moreover, if I dug into the stack an inch or so down I would encounter, in addition to more indeeds and quites, such things as my absolute conviction (three or four years later) that gloomy-Sunday Schopenhauer had said all that was necessary to say about "the human condition"—Christ! The *human condition*!—that Plato failed completely to understand the artist, and that Zola was the greatest novelist who ever lived (including, of course, all the

novelists I hadn't read). All of this I imparted to my sister in copious outpourings of passionate prose, aided and abetted by platoons of indeeds and quites and hyperbolic exclusionary constructions like "If there's one thing I can't stand it's" or "You *must* read Albert Camus's *Plague*. It's *the* finest novel of the post-war period!" (I even gave her a copy of the Modern Library edition one Christmas: can you imagine giving someone *The Plague* for Christmas!) All of this is there in the box, waiting for me, like my furniture at 406 Jordan Hall in the shank of a sunny Sunday afternoon. "Read me. I dare you!"

It's not that this is such a bad trait in anyone (the point is really: how could it be otherwise?), but that I was in college, the first member of the family, apart from Tina, to do so, and it was largely at my sister's urging that I was there at all. And what I didn't know at the time and found out only later on the evening of a horrific fight over my low opinion of psychoanalysis, is that she had wanted to go to college herself and that she resented my being able to go without the least understanding of what it had cost the family. So I was growing up, meaning that I was digesting the wisdom of the world in four-credit units. History was a bore because it etched away everything but the parade of facts ("Sumerian civilization was predominantly agricultural and was therefore skilled in the building of canals and developing effective systems of irrigation"); economics and political science were abstract beyond bearing, allowing nothing erratic to intrude into the organizational chart of governance (What had I to do with initiative, referendum, and recall?), math was outrageously peopleless, and as a consequence I got D's in all these courses, passing only through the generosity of my professors.

So, from my standpoint, the box of letters is primarily a compendium of tics, large and small. To anyone else, the letters would be "quite" normal or boring or "commonplace." To my sister, who read and re-read them, kept track of them, and put them lovingly in order over a forty-year period, they were a valued possession, tendered to me finally in her blindness within a year of her death for my proper Kierkegaardian self-understanding. To me, who cannot see the forest for the trees, they are a revelation of a fact I would prefer not to confront. The letter of March 12, 1946, and all its kindred to follow, was written with an absence of a certain understanding that has only remotely to do

with my own fallibility as a person. Each episode described as yet had no sequel, no result; it was necessarily written from the standpoint of ignorance and in-betweenness, as all letters, I suppose, are. Thus there is a real inevitability about letters that are re-read: they have the mark of fossils trapped in the tree gum of their own nearsightedness. To put it perhaps too morbidly, the box reminds me of the scene in Mann's *Magic Mountain*—"Here he goes again!"—in which Hans Castorp first sees an X-ray of his own hand. The flesh had fallen away into a blurred mist and he saw the skeleton nesting like a grey armature within. "With prophetic eyes," Mann writes (I have the book open), "he gazed at this familiar part of his own body, and for the first time in his life he understood that he would die."

What a stunner! I couldn't really expect anyone else to understand what this has to do with the slight stoop, the indeeds and quites, and the box of letters. Not to mention the train lunches and the dawning that afternoon in the Eagles card room. It isn't the dying, though I suppose that's the bottom line of it all. Yes! It *is* the dying—but not in the sense of not *having*, or *no longer* having, but of never having had, because you can never understand what "I'm fine," and "Tomorrow'll be fine," and "Don't be dunking the noodle, Buddy," really meant *then, as the words were spoken!* You find out about it all afterwards, in a sudden convulsion of realization. Pop, there it is. And of course it's already over.

Here is what it is like. I used to play a time game while driving along the highway. The idea is to try to envision the scene in which I arrive at my destination. This occurred most often when I was traveling from Santa Barbara to Monterey for a weekend with my sister, a trip Nancy and I have taken over thirty times in the last fifteen years. I have had every thought and daydream imaginable on that dry tedious stretch of 101 between Paso Robles and the Spreckles cutoff. But sometimes, when Nancy is asleep and having run out of diversions and finding myself in a transcendental mood, I would try to erase the time that would lapse between, say, the river bend at King City or the Gonzales water tower and the moment I walk in the front door at Crescent Circle in Monterey. And then I imagine myself doing just that.

It makes no difference whether I'm a few minutes late or early in arriving; accurate timing isn't a factor, but it does help to target your entrance around a likely window of time because the game

is all about condensing two times into one. The important thing is to think undividedly about the moment that will occur around, say, five o'clock, to seal it in a vacuum of deep concentration, isolated from the rest of the here-and-now—in short to teleport my self psychically into a more or less certain future moment (fortune permitting), to see the details of the sagging brick porch, to smell the damp odor of the oak leaves mulching on the garage roof; my sister and Mel (her husband) coming out of the faded persimmon-colored door (with the dolphin knocker we gave them), her arms open (“Welllll, here you are, my brother!” in that soft slow voice), then the hug and the kiss; then the look of the living room, item by item, the Indian rugs on the walls, the arrangement of the furniture, the crack in the fireplace wall that will never get fixed, the storyteller and kachina dolls in the sideboard niche, our mother’s green crystal lamp (from the very era of the Formica coffee table!)—all the appointments of my sister’s house as I have known them for so many years—and then to imprint that “negative” in my mind and keep it alive for the matching positive that would occur when time has run its course, I get out of the car, go down the walk under the oak and experience the full Match as my bracketed projection and the reality are fused—“Welllll, here you are, my brother!”—into a Supermoment.

That’s the idea, but of course it never worked out. The main problem is that you can’t retain the projected arrival scene in the mint condition necessary for the Match with the real arrival. It fades the moment you think of something else, and even to try to keep it alive and vibrant between Gonzales and Crescent Circle at sixty-five miles an hour is unsafe, to say the least. So it slips, like every other thought, into the past where it can be reclaimed only as a “then,” as an artifact of time, never as trapped in the instant of its own conception in real experience. The most that comes of it (if I succeed in remembering the experiment at all by the time I get there) is a vaguely umbilical demonstration that time does indeed lapse, that every moment is mysteriously eaten by its progeny, and that inevitably the moment in which my consciousness finally blinks out and is swallowed in Time’s belly, will be a direct continuation of this very Now in which I write these words, even as this Now is directly attached to an infinite chain of once Nows (now Thens) that stretch backward in the other direction—

back to Gonzales, San Luis Obispo, back to Santa Barbara, to yesterday, last year, to Ithaca, Pittsburgh, New Haven, Saratoga, Penn State and Korea, and on back through the yesteryears to Punxsutawney and my first awareness of the world, whatever that may have been.

In short, this moment, any moment, is made of every other moment, and you have the impression, so hitched is one moment into another, so indivisible, so *close* are they as they unfold through each other, that you *should* be able to walk backward in time on a path of moments to the beginning, if you could only convert time into little steppingstones about the size of your mind's feet. But of course moments, finally, don't really exist; they are known only by what has taken place in them, just as we know space only by objects that occupy it.

So the letters had come back to me as an unforeseen closure of all these times, a Supermoment, if you will, unintentionally achieved. "You might find these interesting," she said. And I do, god knows I do—insidiously interesting. Not for their "youthful" contents, or their forgivable "quite"s and "indeed"s and positions taken on this and that, but for the single overwhelming truth of their all coming back at once in the coffin of this simple cardboard box. I had not anticipated this. I did not know how to deal with it. It occurred to me at one point that I might read the letters in reverse order, like a home movie run backward. But it would come to the same thing: they would always be the enigma of an absence, a set of Harvard Classics in which there was no two dollars secreted away toward some small household extravagance. Even if I began at the end and worked my way to the March 16 letter, it would be moving forward into the same future, in the very same sense in which physicists audaciously claim that time only *seems* to move in one direction through the vanity of human consciousness. So time is what you can never have: there is only the *passing* of time, its constant disappearance in its own progress—a terrible terrible enigma—and to think back on it now, a year after her death, is to relive the nostalgia for my impossible tree house, which became, in time, nostalgia for her and for the others, now long gone, who once constituted a family of sorts that began moving apart at about the time I wrote the first letter.

DAVID MASON

Poems from Greece

Letter from Glyfada

for Alekos Chalikias, January 1997

Midwinter summer: now the Halcyon Days
Tease us with playful possibilities.
After the midday meal, while others sleep,
We drive to the small bay, a natural keep
That holds the heat securely in its walls,
And—this is the part that takes real balls—
As usual not wanting to be rude,
I join my Greek friends bathing in the nude.
The water stuns me more than to the bone.
Salt cures my reddened skin. I dry on stone.
Watching others splash the baptismal sea,
I glimpse a premature Persephone.
Did I say *balls*? We have both sexes here,
Nonchalantly naked in this atmosphere
Of talk, reflected sunlight and sea air,
Most shapes and ages, all devil-may-care.
Amused by gawkers from the road above
Who do not comprehend this kind of love
Of easy pleasure, we seem unconstrained.
As far as I know, no one has complained.

Just one week ago, deadly winter struck.
Not the kind back home where, out of luck,
My wife and friends still wade through waist-deep snow;
Another kind of dread put on its show:
Sheets of rain that gorged the streets to rivers
And in the concrete house gave me the shivers.
Persephone stayed securely underground,

And seven souls in Korinthos were drowned.
 That day confirmed *catastrophe* is Greek.
 The floods have made big headlines all this week:
 "BIBLICAL," they're called. "THE WORST IN 40 YEARS."
 The TV finds a populace in tears.
 Coolly it scans their mud-filled houses, bridges
 Spilled into canyons, roads washed out, whole ridges
 Fallen, wires down, buses wrecked in the brown bay.
 Everyone is interviewed. What they say
 Is that their lives are over, they will live,
 It's insufficient, all we have to give.

It seems there is no Paradise, no plan.
 When pleasure comes, we take it as we can
 Because disaster can transform clear sky—
 Call it the fate of Job, the evil eye
 Or what you will, our suffering exists
 Within our happiness. We make our lists,
 Intend the best, till something comes to wrest
 It from us and consume our little rest.
 Safe in our sunny cove, our here and now
 Reduces eloquence. I mutter, "Wow,"
 And stare as winter sunlight slowly reddens.
 The enemy is everything that deadens
 And deceives, damns, distorts, imprisons love.
 It's cooler now; I know I have to move,
 Yet when late sunlight dazzles off a wave
 I think we are not "born to pray and save,"
 But born to live more fully, born to prove
 What love and friendship offer.

Fondly, Dave

Katerina

She serves up jokes in several languages
 with *spanakópitta*, leek soup, good wine,
 shouts at her bad shoulder, *How one ages!*
 Shouts at the TV set, *That man's a swine!*

So, as the world was spoken into being,
 Katerina rages at a misspent word,
 delights when shown some novel way of seeing
 the commonplace, dismisses the absurd.

Now that she's gone to catch the Athens ferry,
 I watch her red house darken with the sky.
 I must learn better Greek, or else be wary
 of her sharp wit and disapproving eye.

Ah, Katerina, come build up the fire.
 Cajole the world, or tender it with speech.
 I'll watch the traveller in you conspire
 to lure what leaves us back within our reach.

Kalamitsi

A path I had not walked for sixteen years,
 now almost hidden under rain-soaked grass
 so even locals told me it was gone,
 but two steps down where it rounded the bay
 and I was back. My heart beat all the faster.

Though half the olive trees had been cut down
 the stone wall stood, the gate, the little house
 looking as if no one ever lived there,
 the cool spring where I dipped a pot for water
 hidden by bramble mounds, the cistern greening.

I stiffly climbed the gate (now chained and locked)
 and walked the point of land and knew each tree—
 nothing, but private memories, after all.
 It wasn't the loss of time or friends that moved me
 but the small survivals I was here to mark.

I had come through to see this much again,
 and that plank bench under a cypress tree
 where I had placed it all those years ago
 to soak up shade on summer afternoons—
 only a small plank bench, but quite enough.

Schoolchildren at Mistras

Snow falls above the smoky vale of Sparta
 in mountains where the weak were once abandoned.
 Everywhere you turn, the old world is unearthed
 between the shops where citizens still wait
 for a change of season, or, outside of town,
 gather the olives, crate the winter oranges.

A hush ascends the ruined holy city
 from the stare of Christ to battlements above,
 from the nun who leads her three goats out to grass
 and almond trees that blossom another snow—
 silence these schoolchildren happily shatter,
 as if escaping death in the museum.

An Underworld

Knowing you must leave behind the main road
 with its gleeful cars and mopeds speeding by,
 you choose a footpath through the fragrant sage
 beside the dry river. The asphodels
 and almond blossoms flare in slanting sunlight.
 The olive trunks, bent like laboring crones,
 are caught in the stillness of this other way,
 figures in the moment's airy amber.

You do not even know what it is you hunt
 down there, but find the chapel door unlocked,
 the fierce saints fading from their mildewed walls.
 Their faces seem to sink into the lime,
 and with them all the secrets of their faith.
 Still you light a candle, naming your dead—
 a flame as feeble as your own belief,
 as if your good intentions were a help.

There is nothing left but to take the path itself
 wherever it leads you among rock walls
 and gardens it seems no one comes to tend,
 with one eye on the distant, brimming sea
 back where the lived-in houses crowd the road.

The Cypress Tree

I look out the window; the depth
of sky, all sky and nothing more;
and within it, utterly sky-swept,
a slender cypress; nothing more.
Whether sky is starry or dark,
in happy blue or thunder's roar,
always the cypress sways, so stark,
calm, lovely, hopeless; nothing more.

Translated from the Greek of Kostis Palamas (1859–1943)

Carnival of Wind

On islands, as in prairies, one learns the winds
That recompose the makeup of our minds.
Far from the snow of home, I hear the scrape
Of bough on wall. The hair stands on my nape
Until I realize there is no one there.
It's only what the mind does to the hair.

Tonight *apokries* takes place indoors.
Some drink until they're crawling on all fours,
Some merely play at being someone else
While *boreas* drowns out the church's bells.
But even unbelievers think of Lent,
Wondering where the easy weather went.

The Marriage of Alpheus and Arethusa

Pity the poor besotted hunter
 lost in his ardent chase
 after the nymph, summer and winter,
 hoping to glimpse her face.

Were we like that? You moved through woods
 so unpossessably
 my friends agreed you had the goods,
 had them impressively.

And then you crossed to Syracuse,
 changed to a secret stream.
 How could I know this wasn't a ruse
 or just my jealous dream?

My thirst rose up in me, a wave
 transmuting me to water.
 I dashed in a frenzy down to save
 myself from my self-slaughter.

One river flowing east, one west—
 I touch a part of you
 while other tides consume the rest.
 We roil, I startle you,

you me, two separate currents
 that kiss and part in foam,
 testing each other's fond endurance,
 still hunting for our home.

The Dream of Arrival

Awake, I did not know the land
surrounding me: the rocky coves,
sun shimmering off marble sand,
the cypresses and mourning doves.

Stunned by it all, I stared. Around
were cliffs I felt I should have known—
but for doves and waters not a sound,
no highway, house or telephone.

A stranger, eyes behind his shades,
greeted me in words I knew
as I half-knew these sunny glades,
yet by some instinct I withdrew

and asked what island this could be,
hid my longing to be recognized.
I gauged him as I would the sea
until he spoke the name I prized:

“Ithaka.”

Dissembling, I was home,
all I longed for so near at hand.
I saw Penelope, the loom—
then woke, and did not know the land.

I live preparing to arrive,
suffer the deaths of many friends,
survive, surprised to be alive.
My story’s told, but never ends.

24th of March¹

Light fades outside my little bungalow.
 Leaves of bougainvillea hang in air
 as if awaiting word that they will grow
 new souls in sunlight. I can barely hear
 the amplified *esperinós* out there
 because a moped idles by my door
 and Mozart swells my neighbor's stereo.

Paired with Mary and the angel's call,
 tomorrow's anniversary of war
 meant children marching by today. With all
 their laughter, tugging at each other's hair,
 it seemed they could escape the calendar,
 leave priests and teachers to their pious prayer
 and chase creation over the garden wall.

Soon enough, the moped changes gears,
 my neighbor changes music, and what moves,
 afloat in the silent tuning of the spheres,
 appears to be as motionless as leaves
 in planetary darkness. The world receives
 the blessings of its ordinary loves,
 this night, this moment, and these passing years.

¹ 25th March is Greek Independence Day and the Annunciation to the Virgin. *Esperinós* means "vespers."

BARBARA HAAS

Holding the Bag

My first wife had a habit of reading in the bathtub, and the books and magazines scattered around our bathroom were in various stages of drying out—some stiff, some sopping—after having been dipped in her tepid water. That she read until the water had gone tepid was evidence, so she once explained, of how lost she became in the words. The *Fur & Feather Digest* was the best—70° stuff by her own calculations. Its curled and discolored edges bolstered this claim.

I was strictly a shower man, had no interest other than the erotic in easing myself down the sloping sides of that claw-footed tub. And the closest I got to Mim's reading material was to drape a damp magazine over the radiator from time to time.

So the first thing I notice when I'm left to stand in her sunny living room while she takes a phone call in the kitchen is that her books and magazines have a pristine, just-off-the-shelf look these days: no trace of water stains. The *Merck Manual* is shelved next to *The Afro-Cuban Religious Experience*, the Bhagavad-Gita next to *The Rights of the Citizen in Colonial America*.

Between the bookshelves, a windowful of Lake Michigan glitters in the sub-zero cold outside. Since dawn twin sundogs have hovered on either side of the sun, their constancy like that of mythical hounds beside a king's throne. They throw a weird glow across Mim's original art—the Connie Bieber in bronze, the Carmon Slater on the wall. I'm studying them when I hear Mim from down the hall. "Babe" this, "babe" that, something about "babe" I don't catch—all of it followed by peals of high-pitched laughter.

Hers is a textured voice, as multilayered as Baroque music. The sound stacks itself, leaves a visible trace when I close my eyes to listen, as if a variegated thread had woven its way through the melody.

Still in love with the ex-wife?

I pick up a leather-bound volume—Newton’s *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*—and begin flipping through it.

In love or not, it won’t matter for 5-7 years, depending on good behavior, the sentence likely for Mim’s voluntary manslaughter conviction. The jury returned its findings this morning, and she’s free on her own recognizance until a week from next Tuesday when Judge D’Acquisto of the 3rd District Court, Milwaukee County, makes his determination.

I close *The Mathematical Principles* and place it back on an end table.

I’m here right now not to examine her library, nor to ponder love, but to help settle affairs, the foremost task of which is to take possession of the wild game bagged in her basement freezer.

When I think back on our marriage, it isn’t only the lengthy baths and wet book bindings that I remember. Mim’s was a serrated blade of a body—down to 101 pounds at one point, all five-foot-seven-inches of her. It hurt to look at her—the gaunt collarbone, ski-slope breasts, the skin-over-muscle look of her thighs, her body lacking that subcutaneous stratum of fat common to women of childbearing age. It hurt to look—but look I had to. After we made love, I’d roll away, half-afraid I’d find bruises on her where our bodies had rubbed. Folded up on the mattress beside me, she had all the angles of a coat hanger. Sometimes as she lay, back turned, the knobs of her vertebrae as bare as knuckles, she would shudder—not unlike the shudder I had just eased her to—and it would surprise me to realize she was crying.

That first time I said, “Did I hurt you?” and she went instantly rigid, as if startled to find me still there.

Her skin by candlelight was not one hue. A painter would need peach, olive and cream to capture what I saw—and that would only be half of it. Rose and lavender, ivory and rust: flickering candlefire danced these colors before my eyes. I stared at her back, watching her spine rise and fall as she breathed—which she did at intervals lengthy enough to alarm. Like her tendency not to eat, she had a tendency not to breathe, and I sometimes lay in bed next to her wondering if she were choking.

At some point, she lifted up on her elbow and, sheet balled near her chin, turned to me, saying, “Did you want to?”

I blinked. "Want to?" The response was so long in coming I forgot what I'd asked.

"Hurt me."

A masculine need to boast my tenderness alongside my strength—as ingrained as the schoolyard dictum never to strike a girl—rose within me, and I rattled on for a few moments.

It was as if she were listening with her eyes: dark pupil-less ones that drank in my words. "That's good," she said after a bit. She nestled into the crook of my arm. "You've got it, Richard. Self-preservation down to an art."

How so, I wondered.

"Let's face it. People stay together when they've had more good times than bad."

"So we'll stay together?"

"Look at us." She raised her arm, a gesture that made a broad sweep of the shadows on the ceiling. "Not jinxed, not pathetic, as wholesome still as baby booties."

"Then why the tears?"

A knot formed between her brows. "It's a curse that I can look back now on Charlie's faults and feel compassion." She named her ex-husband, and I felt my scrotum tense. "Marrying me is like marrying him and me. It's the baggage I bring—baggage I packed myself."

"Who mentioned marriage?" It was hard not to hear ice in my voice.

A silvery laugh issued forth, one that carried with it a wintry undertone. "You will. On January 19th at 7:37 A.M." She named a date three months in the future.

The truth is I proposed to her the next week, partly to nullify her prediction, partly as a hedge against that baggage.

Where it succeeded with the former, it failed with the latter. By the time our marriage ground to a halt in 1985, I was a daily martini-aholic and felt like I'd handled a cruise ship's worth of suitcases and steamer trunks.

When Mim comes back into the room now, she's changed from the boxy gabardine suit in which she approached the Honorable D'Acquisto's bench into a pair of Silver Tab Levi's and a sun-faded aqua T-shirt. Her bones are noticeable—strong ones, to be sure—but jutting and poking out where another woman—my wife?—might have curves.

Vulnerable and starved, I think.

Mim settles a tea tray on the ottoman between us, the pot an upswept stainless creation that a museum gift shop might peddle. As she pours out, I comment on her elegant surroundings. Even when we were together and money scarce she had a fondness for neatly made objects. Her taste in hunting equipment bore this out. Where I made do in those days with my grandfather's double-barrel side-by-side that was as nearsighted, often, as its original owner, she packed a Winchester Diamond Grade over-and-under with a hand-checked stock of bird's-eye maple. Both barrels were bored for different chokes—the top with an open pattern, the bottom tighter, more effective at short range. I never saw anything but a clean kill when she took aim.

Ironical, now, given her situation.

That shotgun was confiscated after her arrest, unnecessarily, I might add: a bullet killed Mim's husband. The 9mm pistol never surfaced. Inability to place a murder weapon in Mim's hands led to the reduced charge.

She sighs now. "Elegance won't help where I'm headed." When Mim seats herself on the sofa and tucks her bare feet beneath her, I catch a glimpse of frosty white polish on her toenails. I think of what my state of mind would be just before sentencing and wonder where she found the nerve to steady a tiny brush. Mim says, "Most days I'll be lucky to see one exquisite ray of sunlight."

"Your lawyer said you'll probably land at the minimum-security prison at Appleton."

"Is that to cheer me up?"

My smile is weak. "I thought I'd try for something upbeat."

"Mr. Bardy. Always good for a laugh." She regards me now with those eyes made less for seeing than hearing, and I am surprised to feel a panic of nostalgic proportions, when she uses that pet name, tighten its way through me. Mr. Bardy and Schmoo. I'd forgotten that.

My feet press against the carpet and the teacup rattles in my hand. This morning at 4:00 A.M. as I lay staring up at the ceiling, my wife, whom I thought dead to the world, rolled over and clapped her hand over my heart.

"She's dogging you, Richard. She's got your scent."

I shook my head up at the darkness.

Beth's breath felt hot. "Don't keep anything. Don't bring her stuff here."

"Relax. This isn't a souvenir hunt."

I could hear the backbone in her voice. "You will not get through that door, I promise you."

The thought of Beth-turned-cerberus, like a cross between Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and the hounds of hell, both amused and worried me. I'd already explained to her that I would sell Mim's wild game. My word-of-mouth business as a guide for hunters creates a network for all kinds of transactions like that.

"Dead meat," she said. "Like people use to bait traps."

"Don't push me, Beth. I'm not scared of Mim."

"That's what worries me." She scooted over to the edge of the bed, and we did not speak again. Soon after I had begun following the trial I'd catch Beth muttering, giving me those caught-you-red-handed looks. The darkness of a marriage gone bad twelve years before had taken up residence in our house, was tracking its gumbo from room to room. The old shit got mixed with the new, and before long Beth—Beth!—had threatened divorce.

Mim winks at me now over the teacups. "You're gray, balding and a little paunchy." Her tone is matter-of-fact enough that this seems a positive appraisal.

"You've still got the look of a late-season deer run skinny."

She peers into her cup, swirls its contents. "This tea is the first thing I've had since a few lettuce leaves on Wednesday."

It's weak tea, the sort that might steep for hours and nevertheless taste pale and slight.

"Let me take you out for dinner. We can celebrate." I name a fish fry place on Brady Street.

"Celebrate? You're daft, Bardy."

"Okay, then, commiserate."

She lifts her chin. "Misery loves company. I know what I'm getting out of all this." She settles her cup and saucer on the ottoman. "What are you in for?"

I swallow a sip of tea. "Ostensibly to take a load of meat off your hands."

"Ostensibly." She shifts her gaze from me to the sundogs outside.

During the thirteen days it took to complete her trial I came to

recognize, even greet familiarly during recesses, the crime voyeurs who piggybacked their interest in Mim Rockaway's fate with that of the "gentleman" rapist's down the hall in courtroom 356. The quest for justice possesses a tension not unlike that of major sports events. Groupies gather, begin to rally behind that tension, maybe even place bets. But tension can't explain my presence for thirteen days in the row behind the Defense's table. It can't explain my getting wrapped up in the proceedings to such an extent that I missed my son's pine wood derby at the Scoutarama last Friday. Tension can't explain my presence here now.

Mim's gaze slides back to me, to my left hand, where I wear no wedding ring.

"You're married."

I affirm this.

"Happily?"

I nod—because, really, there's nothing easier right now.

"Then why are you here?"

To break gaze would be to admit something. Even to blink would be a confession, of sorts. The space between us is bright with winter's icy sunshine, but webby and dense too, as something negotiates itself in the three or four feet that separate us. Then Mim laughs.

"Don't worry. It's not a come-on. Tiger put me up to it."

My neck prickles. "Where's Tiger come in?"

"On the phone." Mim gestures toward the kitchen, and I recall the laughing inquiries about "babe." "Worried is how I'd characterize her. With all this. She's worried about the goods." Mim nods at the Bieber, the Carmon Slater, a little Argo maquette I'd not noticed tucked away as a bookend. "I'd guess she's hotfooting her way over right about now."

The thought of her mother sends an instant headache from temple to temple. During the time of my marriage to Mim, Tiger Bradley not only became Milwaukee's preeminent collector, the woman who built the Channing collection from "an eclectic hodgepodge of forgettable fringe works to the multi-million-dollar cash cow it is today" (a quote from the *Daily Sentinel*) but also the dirty older woman who serially groped her son-in-law and propositioned him at every turn. Mim's breasts were less familiar to me than hers, so frequently did Tiger flash them over hors

d'oeuvres, frittatas, Bloody Marys—even in upscale restaurants where the waitstaff was trained to indulge such behavior.

I stand, rub my hands together. “Let’s get going on that meat.”

“There. I’ve gone and spooked you.”

Nonsense, I tell Mim, reaching out to help her up from the sofa. “But it’s best to let sleeping dogs lie.” Tiger Bradley isn’t so much a sleeping dog as she is a rutting jackal.

Mim remains seated. “Something she said disturbed me.”

I don’t doubt this.

“She said, ‘Detain him. Just kill some time.’ Can you imagine—telling me that? To kill time? Today of all days?” Her face looks raw and open, the closest she’s been to tears in two weeks.

The argument is more memorable than what we were arguing about, though less distinct by a long shot than the buck, newly gutted and strapped to the wide trunk of a Plymouth Fury III.

The one that got away, I thought as the car eased past us on I-94. Nine Boone & Crockett points with a 21” spread, a non-typical whose brush-entwined hooves made evident its last forest trek.

Mim and I had stalked through timber all morning, waiting for anything to amble by, the shotguns cold enough in our gloved fingers that the metal burned for the first hour and then left no sensation after that save a bone-throb.

Aboard its primer-painted chariot, the buck was stiff as a tree, its tongue askew. Wisconsin weekends are full of such sights, convenience store parking lots a trophy hall of venison.

The buck whizzed by just as Mim and I had taken a break in our fighting. But the sight of it—and whatever lost chances it suggested—was ammo enough to fuel us up again.

She had dropped to 104 pounds by then and had taken to pegging her pants like some 50s tough. That combined with the kohl eyeshadow and Camel unfiltered slanting most moments from her bottom lip had rendered her employable only in the most intractable of artscene noir settings, circa 1975, Downer Street.

The craggy lakeshore blurred past the window of our vintage Mustang, and I noticed a ragged V of geese stitching a hieroglyph against the slate sky. Mim blew a smoke ring when she saw them, stabbed her finger through it and made some curlicues, as if the

geese in their flyway were a message she was writing that morning just for me.

Lord knows, I'd had an earful by then, enough "You saids" and "You didn'ts" and "You, you, you" to know the tone of her voice signalled *The End*. That our marriage endured another nine years reveals a lack of imagination on my part and an uncharacteristic lassitude on hers.

All the way from Sheboygan to Milwaukee she sat scrunched up against the door, knees pressed against the dashboard, looking as doubled over on herself as a compass. I glared at the gray strip of highway disappearing beneath our wheels, Lake Michigan like an old scar on my left, Mim wounding me on my right, our marriage a surgery performed with dull instruments.

"Yeah," she says now, settling a venison haunch in one of the boxes I've brought, "we were charming, you and I. I fought with you more than I did with Charlie and less than I did with Pascal. Not that that had anything to do with what happened," she adds quickly. "I never had a death wish for him."

When she mentions the deceased, she does it gingerly—a careful experiment—as if tasting the air with his name.

I lift a stack of chops from her chest-style freezer, settle them in one of the boxes, and wonder if Pascal had a hand in this hunt, if he helped store the meat here for the future meals he'd never have. The basement is dank and cheerless with a hulking boiler at one end. Steam whistles through its pipes. The few windows are buried under snow, which on a bright day like today gives an odd yellow cast to the grayness. It's tomblike here and cold. I settle three pheasant roasters in the box. Cleaning up after the dead husband chills me.

I say, "We had hunting, you and I. That's something, I guess."

"Neither Charlie nor Pascal were much for that. No feel for the business end of a shotgun. Not that it matters now for either of them. Pascal, for obvious reasons. And Charlie, because . . ."

Mim pauses a moment, sucks in a breath. The dark humor of that remark sinks in. It's hard to read her face—the way one brow arches while the other does not; the way her lips part—but I'd say she's torn between horror and amusement.

"Anyway," she says, "I heard Charlie joined an ashram in Telluride. That he mortifies his flesh once a year. Steel grappling

hooks sunk under the skin. Along with twenty other devotees he's led around the ashram's courtyard. Some kind of ritual, huh?"

"I'll stick with hunting."

"That's the chaser to a marriage with me. Death or torture." She mimes a quick visual scan of me. "How did you escape so unscathed?"

"Who said I did?"

After handling all the meat, the tips of her fingers are cold when she tilts my chin to face her, and I'm reminded of winter's sting, turning your flesh to ice. "Behold, the eyes of someone who has outlived a haunting." She studies me, narrows her eyelids.

I shake my head, as much to dispute as to move away.

But her touch follows me. "I *care* about your ghosts."

My fingers twine among hers, and just like a man in love for the first time I begin with my thumb to explore her hand's topography. "Adding my ghosts to yours would be like a nonstop Halloween. Travel light, Mim."

She looks at the meat stacked around us. "That's what this is all about." Still holding hands, she asks what I plan to do with it, and I tell her I've brokered deals with several lodges, even a couple of hotel chefs, boutique restaurants that delight in serving exotic game.

The edges of Mim's mouth turn down, and her shoulders slump. "I wouldn't have eaten it anyway. I've been a vegetarian for years."

This news makes me laugh—something I instantly regret. Her eyes gore me.

"Well, I mean, it's incongruent, right? For a vegetarian to hunt." I swing her hand lightly.

She pulls away, and her nod is terse, serious. "Where congruency is a virtue, yes."

Sometimes talking with her is like tracking a sneaky bird through heavy cover. The best strategy requires fits and starts: a lugubrious exchange sandwiched between uncomfortable silences. But over the years, I have lost my way in Mim Rockaway's domain. . . . Even today I've rushed in, neglecting to take the lay of the land, consult a compass, draw a preliminary bead or sniff out telltale scents.

"I'm sorry, Mim."

"For what?"

"It."

"You haven't asked if I'm guilty as charged."

A shrug seems the best bet here. "I believe your lawyer's version of events."

"You'd make a lousy prosecuting attorney, Bardy boy."

"It's less of a stretch that way."

"A lousy juror, too."

"So be it."

She flattens her palm against the gray somber walls, and when she speaks again her tone is grave. "Because none of us is above the law, you know."

When she notices that I don't warm to the topic, just keep pitching wrapped meat into these boxes, she adds, "I mean the law of Newtonian physics. For every action, there is an opposite but equal reaction." Mim waits a bit. "If you've ever felt a gun recoil you know that."

I fold the box lid over and under, the prospect of getting into this as appealing as a run-in with Tiger. "I'm going to hustle on out to the car."

"Someone died, and someone will pay." Mim's hand rests against the wall, and she's staring at it, as if judging its paleness against the cinder block. "You've got to admire the symmetry. The neatness."

A crease forms between her eyes. Beyond how composed and poised she was in courtroom 312 today, beyond how draped she looked on the sofa a while ago, I know it's eating away at her, something even justice rendered can't settle.

Mim always hung with the search the longest, when a cripple went down over rough country. I can remember her beating through brambly thatch against a stiff nor'easterly for a half-hour after even the dogs had given up. A zealot, to be sure. After retrieving a cripple, she dispensed with it quickly, palm spanning its back, finger and thumb compressing the heart for a few moments. She stares at the wall now, trying to puzzle it through—the neatness and symmetry she's determined to admire—a wild thing, gutshot and left to worry its wound.

"Remember that day, that cornfield south of Rhinelanders?"

The image floats up out of the murk, and I find myself bracing against it, its kick. "That combine?"

There's a nod. She blinks, swallows. "I lost my innocence that day."

"Assholes, Mim. You can't handicap for the assholes."

Her voice comes as a raspy whisper. "It started me on a path that led here. Because"—she stretches out her hand, as if she might clutch my arm, but the action falls short. I'm left to imagine the bird's weight of those fingers. "Because someone died, someone will pay." Alongside the hushed quality, her voice has the neutrality of a math student's when poring over a story problem. "But there's no symmetry in it for me. Five-to-seven is not enough. Whether at Appleton or elsewhere. I'm still waiting for the recoil."

"I don't follow you, Mim. In that field, they were driving the birds. Harvesting corn and driving the birds all at the same time. What's that got to do with you?" A hunting party of bozo farmboys—ten of them—sitting astride a John Deere eight-picker—shotguns banging away at the roosters that scattered out of the corn in advance of the combine. Running roosters, sitting roosters, not a one of them flushing, wild or close. It was a day of indiscriminate slaughter.

Something ignites behind her eyes. "No one pots a bird on the ground, unless it's wounded. What's the punishment for something like that? A fine? What they did It was out of balance, against nature. No fine can make that right."

The rest of the Rhinelander image unfurls: shotgun blasts hurling pheasants into the dirt with such force the dust explodes where they fall.

Mim leans against the cold cinder block. She covers her face with her hands, rubs her eyes. "For what I did, for what happened Even five-to-seven I don't know that retribution is sufficient."

It's the confession not even the county prosecutor could wrangle from her—and how appropriate, I think: here in the catacombs as we pull dead meat from the deep freeze. When I lie down this night to sleep I'll feel like I spent the day in a morgue. "Serve it first. Your time. Then decide if it's sufficient."

This response pleases her. She lifts her hands. There's a smile. "Bardy, you're a survivor." When I shrug this off, she says, "No, I mean it. You could send an SOS with a thimble. Purify ditch water. Find a fresh trail in dry brush. You're the man, Bardy."

A box of wild game is at my feet, and I stoop to lift it. "I taught you everything I know."

Mim slinks back into the shadows. "But look how far it's gotten me."

"Present circumstances notwithstanding, of course, she learned how not to be tragic. In her time with you. I credit you with that, Dickie. Settling her down. You got her away from that frightful warehouse district. All those lesbians. Even during your impotency, she didn't jump ship. You couldn't get it up, but did Mim bail? Hell, no. She left those dykes in the dust." Satisfied with the fortitude her daughter had shown, Tiger punctuates her speech with a snap of the head and a sip of gin. Then she clasps her hand around my wrist, the pressure that of talons. "Giving up the sauce was the best thing you could do, Dickie."

Even though I wiped away the kiss after Tiger greeted me, I still feel her smudge high on my cheek. She's a woman who applies lipstick so territorially she leaves stains on teacups and glasses. Years ago I convinced myself that she stood to piss and half-expected her one day to lift her leg at me. Tiger is the danger my wife in the darkness this morning could not anticipate. My shoulders press back against the sofa, and I cock my head. "I'm no longer impotent, if that's what you mean."

Tiger's wearing an embroidered kaftan, its collar Nehru-esque. With toggle-stays like these, it would take some tall fumbling to flash a breast or two. Under the thick fabric, her shoulders shake with mirth. "Like it's my business?"

"I mean"—I lean conspiratorially close—"I have a child now."

Behind the amusement, her eyes sweep me. The twelve years since we last met have sharpened the force of her gaze, the peregrine-like visage, the predatory smack of her mouth as she enunciates each word. Swept back from her forehead, her silver-black hair emphasizes the sleek volpine shape of her face. Her nose, broken decades ago in a domestic spat, completes this effect. She's a cross between a hard-coifed ambassador and a thug, the hybrid carried to a vanishing point extreme where there is no difference.

I give an elbow nudge and speak *sotto voce*. "No test tube baby, this one, Tiger. We got him the old-fashioned way."

"Take care, Dickie." Seated there on the sofa, she steadies her

drink, shifts it from her left hand to the right. "Methinks the lady doth protest too much." Her frown settles on a nowhere spot high above Lake Michigan, and I glance, too. The sundogs have tracked their master to the other side of the sky by now, but the light has a cast: filtered gold. The temperature had dropped to eleven below last I checked.

Mim throws us a look when she walks into the room. She sets a basket of pâté and crackers on the end table, and Babe bounds up from his place on the Oriental. Before Mim can shoo him away he's wolfed down a hunk of pâté.

Babe. The cause of all that phone laughter a while ago. A hundred-pound chocolate Labrador with a head like Mt. Rushmore. He has drooled since Tiger ushered him in, little frothy spots here, frothy spots there, a froth deposit at my crotch.

"He greets you genitally," Tiger—always helpful—had said. Apparently she'd been dog-sitting him throughout the trial and has now brought him back.

Mim opens one panel of the French doors, and Babe scrambles out into the snow. He trees a squirrel. In the next instant, he pees on the birdbath. Then he posts up at the front gate, barking out at the street, balls prominent under uplifted tail. When he comes back inside, he has ice pellets in the pads of his paws. Over by the fireplace he stands, one paw lifted, ears drooping, strained tuba sounds issuing from his brickish muzzle.

"It's obvious how he got his name." I nod at the brown beast. "Is he like this on the hunt?"

Mim presses her lips together and starts rubbing Vaseline into the leathery pad of his paw. Tiger tosses her head. "You two and hunting. I always swore killing small animals was what kept you together so long." She leans toward me, her ivory teeth wet. "Hunting isn't everything, Dickie."

"Don't tell my clients that."

She scoots closer, wants to hear all about my marvelous little business, all about my fabulous little success. It must be delightful to have established myself, such a triumph.

But I've got my sights trained on Mim, who has continued massaging Vaseline into Babe's paw. Her fingers tend to the details, separate out the chunky toes, coat the fur between them. There's a maternal quality to her work.

Mim's voice sounds strained when she says, "He doesn't hunt."

"What? A non-hunting Labrador? Do tell."

"I mean, he hates the blast of a gun. Can't track. Won't run ditches. He's got no nose."

"The worthless mutt!"

Babe takes this for praise and dumps his blocky head in my lap. He grins his goose-liver breath up at me.

Like the proud grandmama, Tiger hunkers toward him. "How's my big good man? That's right. How's my man today?"

Mim twists the lid on the Vaseline, sets it aside. She looks around, as if for another domestic task. An ice bucket stands on the end table. Mim brought it out when Tiger arrived. She picks it up, doesn't glance at her mother. The few cubes inside rattle around. She says something about a refill. On her way to the kitchen, she grabs Tiger's now-empty glass.

After she's gone, Tiger scoots toward me, her whisper cloying. "Were you frightened in retrospect, frightened for your life?"

I bump Babe's head aside and stand. Packed away in the back of my Blazer and hard as granite in the sub-zero cold, the wild game awaits delivery to its posh venues. A half-full bag of dog food stands by the door. Tiger carried it in when she showed up with Babe. She carried it in, and it hasn't moved from that spot. No one's said anything, no one's so much as looked at it, but it's been clear ever since Babe thumped his paws against my chest that he's to go with me when I leave here. And that bag.

Tiger's whisper is thick. "I mean, it could've been you."

"What could've been me?"

She smiles. "Playing the tenderfoot, huh, Dickie. But that's not you." Beneath the intense gaze, I can feel her tracking me, trying to draw a bead. "All the nights you lay beside her, all the years you didn't kill each other. Both of you armed to the teeth. Don't you wonder now—why Pascal, not me? Don't you wonder why you didn't die?"

"Fuck off, Tiger."

She laughs. "That won't fill the bill, Dickie. It's deeper than that. The truth is too great for one or two people to bear. So who else is there, after me, but you? Mim didn't have anyone else, anyone who once knew her, once loved her." She tilts her head oddly, and the stiff fabric of her kaftan rustles. "Or maybe still loves her."

"Don't be preposterous."

"Sure, you've got your wife, your son. But are you free of Mim? I think not. Not even murder can help you there."

"Voluntary manslaughter, Tiger."

Tiger laces her fingers behind her head and lifts her chin, appraising me. Her days are spent evaluating brush strokes, color and line, judging aesthetic movement—but I can see her eating insects during Biblical famines or drinking blood along the Donner Pass or abandoning her children in Rwanda: she would survive by doing what she must. She says, "You always knew what to do. I could admire you for that. So smart."

"I don't follow you, Tiger."

She shrugs. "It's better that way. In—how long? twelve years, more than that?—our paths haven't crossed. This city *is* big enough for the both of us. After today, I don't expect to see you again."

I have the sense of having been pushed along something, worked out of heavy cover into the light brush—twigs, and clumps—along the edges. "It's not like you to wax sentimental."

Tiger rises from the sofa, draws near. "I'm a collector. I find myself hanging onto things most people would not. Any other old woman would be called a pack rat." She turns to look out the window, her sleek profile etched against the glass. "But I've made millions."

I had forgotten this aspect of Tiger, the one who advertises her wealth, dotes on it. She is among what must be only a handful of consumers in 1997, according to Cadillac's marketing survey, who favored fully loaded El Dorado sedans.

She faces me. "You're not like me, Dickie. You jettison the excess. All that tromping through the woods has taught you what to carry, what to leave."

"You flatter me, Tiger."

"Oh, it's not a compliment. But I can admire a survival skill when I see one."

"So cut to the chase."

"Mim's been under the gun like nothing else. It's hounding her."

"And understandably so. Take a look."

"Not everything about this is as on the surface as you might think. Let me just thank you in advance." She bows stiffly. "Maybe we'll all laugh ten years from now."

"Nobody's going to laugh."

"It's clear I don't have to spell it out." She places a hand on my forearm, slides it up to my bicep, fingers lingering. Her gaze settles on my chest. "In a different time, under different circumstances, we would have been lovers. I guess we can both regret that."

"We would've ended up killing each other, Tiger."

She arches her brows. "Runs in the family, I guess, that."

In the kitchen, I lean against the window frame, part the curtains. Chimney wisps float above frozen rooftops. True to the end, the sundogs are making their final descent toward the horizon, the sun a blaze between them, and I watch. It'll be hard for me to shake this day, harder still to walk out of here free. As recently as four hours ago, at the courthouse, I felt unencumbered, even light. But when I think back to the courthouse now, I know the lightness to be an illusion.

Designed in the manner of other buildings where Justice must balance her scales, the county courthouse has a cut limestone exterior, its Corinthian columns recalling a Golden Era in the improbable Milwaukee downtown. Inside, the polished marble and the bronze statuary and the walnut paneling can bear the burden of the truths brought forth there. Those materials are sturdy enough to absorb the crimes, the whispering robes of justice dark enough to swallow whole the ugliness, the panic and desperation, the blood, until they become part of those materials. Marble isn't just marble but marble-plus-the-crime. The profundity of stone, metal and wood become an ideal counterpart to the dark stalking wolf. They can bear the weight, even cleanse it.

But Mim's kitchen can't do that. Her copper cookware is too slight and jangly, the skillets, though made of heavy gauge aluminum, not strong enough to bear the weight.

I turn away from the window. The walls are awash in late afternoon light. Mim stirs water in a saucepan, her face shadowed by the array of pans hanging over the stove. Everything looks precarious and insubstantial. The heaviness of this day bows my shoulders forward, and I sink against the counter.

The water in the saucepan begins to boil, and Mim stirs more rapidly. When a funnel forms, she slides an egg from a dish into it. A timer stands on the counter. She cranks it to three minutes and turns to me. "He understands voice commands, believe it or not."

I stare grimly at the tile floor. "Babe."

"He's what I'll miss more than anything. Not freedom, not people. I've menstruated once since 1987. You know yourself I could never have a child. . . . Please, Bardy boy. He's my baby."

"Mim, it's dicey as hell."

She grabs my shirtsleeve, yanks it up. "Look. When I get out, he'll be—what?—six, maybe eight years old. He can help me bridge the gap, all that time locked away. He can bridge the whole goddamn thing."

"Mim, I've got a family. I can't"

"He knew me before, he'll know me after."

I push her away, and we face off like that, eyes twitchy. When the day shakes down to its final ugliness, I'll feel like the one locked up. "*You told your mother I was impotent.*"

Mim looks surprised, then stares at the pans hanging above the stove. "I didn't tell her."

"How did she find out?"

Mim places a slotted spoon next to the saucepan. Plates are stacked in a glass-fronted hutch, and she reaches for one. "How does she find anything out? Maybe she guessed it. I don't have to remind you what my childhood was like." She pops a slice of bread into the toaster, watches the heat coils glow red. All at once her eyes widen. "You know what? She read about it."

"Read about it?"

"In my diary."

"You wrote that?" I whirl to face her. "Something that only happened when I was drinking?"

"I needed an outlet." She hesitates. "It was a bad time."

"How the hell did Tiger get her hands on your diary?"

Mim frowns down at the toaster, and her response is so long in coming I think she's seeing the future there in the toaster's shiny sides, or at least the week after next. "She found it. Here. Right afterward"

The kitchen counter has an edge of beveled oak. It cuts into my back as I lean against it. "She came here?"

Mim nods.

It only takes a moment. "Tiger cleared the evidence. She secured the crime scene."

Slotted spoon in hand, Mim skims the poached egg from the saucepan. She places the egg in a dish and pokes at it with a wedge of toast. Yolk bleeds onto the gelatinous white, and she lifts

the toast for a bite, holds it there balanced for a moment, then drops it onto a plate. Mim pushes the plate away and meets my gaze. "The woman worked like a white tornado."

I lean against the counter, elbows braced. Now I know what I'll find in that bag of dog food.

Fully loaded, a 9mm pistol weighs no more than a cigarette case. It's designed primarily for close range but can be pushed to 100 meters by elevating the barrel 25-30 degrees above the horizontal. The pearl inlay grip on this model was probably optional, a luxury addition to the platinum finish. Standing on icy Pier 19, wind spiking about me, I sight down its snub barrel. Handguns never interested me, whether for self-defense or as collector's items, though I've known dozens of people who acquire them, the trade in weapons as lively as the stock exchange. This one would fetch a handsome price, would round out someone's collection of curios, especially once its history surfaced. I squint down the shiny barrel and catch myself trying to see what she must have seen. I find instead the sluggish water, Lake Michigan's waves heavy with ice chunks and slush. The eastern horizon is dark enough to make you shiver, a thick and profound blackness that looms over the water as if ready to pounce. Twilight hovers toward the west, and rush hour headlights wink along the lakefront. Out here, 100 yards into the lake, the city is pretty remote. The pier's concrete edges are draped under a slippery crust, all of the pilings sculpturesque and ice-covered, a banquet laid with a frozen tablecloth.

Bumping against my thigh as he shifts from one paw to the other, Babe whines. A frost rhyme has formed on his muzzle. He's careful not to hold eye contact with me, though. The storm flap on my coat flutters in the wind, and he looks no higher than it, some native survival skills of his own kicking in.

There are laws of the jungle I barely understand, though I fancy myself capable of guiding other men by them. Of course, Wisconsin meadows are not the jungle. Any more than a lakefront living room is. At least I would not have said as much. Until today.

Know the difference between life-without-parole and five-to-seven? A circle of petticoats. That's the joke I'll never get to tell, not to my grandchildren or to buddies over a game of Sheeps-head or to clients on the hunt.

Baggage.

The first report shatters the twilight like a firecracker and splinters the knobby wedge of ice that looks for all the world like an Egyptian deity. Beside me, Babe goes aerial. When he lands, he slips and slides, legs akimbo. His nails dig into the ice, but to no effect. He sprawls like a spider, ears flapping in the wind. The second shot ricochets off the concrete ramparts in a way that pleases me, and Babe scrambles. His back legs have gone out from under him, and he skitters toward the edge of the pier.

Let him go, let him drown in the fucking lake. I take a 9mm aim at his ugly head, and never has a target looked so large. It's the kind of day that makes you want to put something out of its misery, and here in the frozen dark is my chance.

But I drop the gun to my side, drill the remaining bullets into the ice. When the chamber clicks, I give a big roundhouse toss and watch out over the water as the pistol arcs. The waves accept it, fold it in, cold steel sinking into an ice bath. Like the stone, metal and wood of Milwaukee's courthouse, Lake Michigan can cleanse all evils.

The dog lunges, still trying to get purchase. I seize his collar, drag him across the pier with me. He wheezes, tenses those massive neck muscles, trying to fight. On ice, his 100 pounds are formidable, and we do this ball and chain routine all the way to the parking lot. I end up half-yanking, half-wrestling him along.

Beth said not to bring anything back. She told me not to keep anything. But when you've been to the gates of hell, how can you resist?

He can sleep in the crawlspace beneath the woodshed until I clear out one of the kennels. He'll be Bubba, not Babe, gnaw beef bones, not lap up pâté. Once spring comes, once the earth bursts again from its wintry grave, my son and I will train him. If he can't hunt, we'll try tracking. If he can't track, we'll try obedience. If he can't obey, we'll give him a poodle cut and sit him on a pillow. By then, of course, we all will have found a soft spot in our hearts, and he won't be an outdoor dog any longer but have run of the house. I can see his big paws tracking mud and grit from room to room, I can see him slobbering on the curtains. By then I'll no longer think about driving him to a nowhere spot along the Eagle River, a place where wolves are known to roam, and dropping the tailgate on the Blazer. And I'll be free.

SYDNEY LEA

Reasons to Hate Poetry

at least sometimes: as when little Jimmy, four years old,
whose smile can take the temperature of winter rooms
—softwood boughs heavy with soot-dirty snow outside, and the
sky
a tin cup's color, rat-tatting walls with something between snow
and rain:
can take their temperature and then, shining, jimmy it up, up . . .

as when, I was saying before, he flies
out through the misted back window of the beat, Bondo-patched
Ford,
of which, in a hurry for school and work, his mother has
lost control, and which
pursues its awful arc till the trunk end whacks an ash
and the tagsale carseat's cheap catch quits, as quick as my dead
dad's World

War buddies said Italians would. I hate a lot of poems because
I'm rich
compared to Jimmy, or at least that's part of what I despise, and
the poor kid's
head finds that very tree, oblate leaves sprawled corpse-like on
the ground,
and deeper in woods, one imagines the chant of an owl,
though it be daytime. I'll somehow suit its eight interrogations to
the scene,

which is all a palimpsest of ruin, is all a stillness now—no, is
panic and wound
and that spooky call, which, however, I've had to invent, this
being a poem,

whose prospects I loathe enough that it can't really seem to start.
Hence irrelevant allusions to war; my gone father; his gone
friends;
Italians; "palimpsest"; corpses. Hence the goddamned owl.

But a poet, he takes or makes all this to show his largeness of
heart
(or sometimes hers, though perhaps less often, granted).
Our sensitive poet puts Jim in a nearby clinic, a tangle of IV
tubes
in his body, sedated because it gets violent because he's got no
notion of Fate,
is not like us—o childhood! o innocence! And though we won't
say it,

a part of us breathes: a poem! a poem! There's so much with
nothing to do
with him that we can include. In his mother, who has bad teeth
and a waitress job, we may see a recapitulation, say, of Mary-who-
mourns-
her-Son, savaged. We can shout our indignation at power,
American power, which reviles the weak. We'll write such a
powerful poem.

The helicopter, air ambulance that drones
above, will present a figure. For something. We'll dream it up
later.
Meanwhile, we could use another bird: let's look one up in a
book
to be sure it lives here and so may seem true; it will perch on a
strand
of wire by a fallow farm, which that 'copter can fly, heedlessly,
over.

We need the harshest song. (Oh, what we'd do for a rook!)
The wail of despair, cruelty, poverty, the wide world's wealth of
wrong.
"Middle East" will always mean turmoil: example. Guns. Bombs.
Knives.

Most whites, if not us, oppress everyone and -thing we might
think to name
with might. But we can't go on. Or not I, rather. Not here, thank
God,

thank Fate, whatever. Jimmy survives, and the smile that shines.
He's alive.

LOUIS SIMPSON

The Further Off from England

The further off from England the nearer is to France.
—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

I traveled to France with Miriam in October of '95 when Paris was undergoing a wave of bombings. There were soldiers with machine guns looking you over when you went into the Métro, and your briefcase was searched when you entered a store, otherwise life proceeded normally. What would you have? One must live—one can't stop for every war or revolution or other bizarrerie that comes along. In any case, one must not exaggerate.

The receptacles for garbage in the streets and Métro had been closed, the covers clamped down with metal bars so they couldn't be opened by a terrorist who wished to deposit a bomb. But the Parisians attempted to follow their usual method of disposing of garbage—they would place their candy wrapper or *Figaro* on the cover of a garbage container and it would fall off. The sidewalks were littered with paper. It was the kind of authentic detail that would have pleased the author of *Sentimental Education*.

I see many things as fiction when I am in France. The writing in letters of gold above a bakery, for example: GLACIER BOULANGER PATISSIER TRAITEUR LUNCH. What is a TRAITEUR? Not what you may think—though the proprietor may have been that too. Better consult your dictionary.

The things in the window were like works of art. Cakes with scrolls of chocolate on top, or thin slices of apple or peach . . . pies filled with custard. Weren't these masterpieces as truly as the Cézanne exhibition? A postmodernist would say that there was no difference. You can always tell what people whose ideas end in *ist* will say.

I went with Miriam to the Champs-Élysées to see the exhibition. We couldn't get in by the short line—the people on that line had bought a ticket months in advance. But the general public would be admitted at two o'clock. We decided that instead of waiting

around until two we would go to Père-Lachaise. Visiting the great cemetery seemed a fitting way to spend a Sunday afternoon. We took the Métro, having got over our first uneasy feelings about bombs. We looked at one of the admirable maps on the wall where everything is laid out in straight lines, station to station, with no needless topography, and I wrote down the places where we had to transfer to another line. I stepped back and fell down a flight of stairs.

Everything unrolled slowly. I must say that I was good at it—I didn't try to stop. I kept rolling down the concrete steps, walls and ceiling flashing by, until the fall ended and came to a stop. I began collecting myself. My glasses were close by, within hand's reach and not broken. A finger on the hand was bloody . . . but that was all. Someone came down the steps and helped me to my feet. A Frenchman . . . his wife or female friend was with him. They looked very concerned. I told them I was OK. They asked again. I said, "Je vais bien." Was that the correct way to say it? The man peered into my face. He smiled with sympathy and, I thought, a touch of amusement. Was it my French? The woman was saying that there was someone upstairs in the station I should tell that "there had been an accident." No, I said, "Je vais bien," really.

Miriam was standing at the top of the stairs, looking down. She seemed to be stunned. A few other people had collected. If I felt anything it was embarrassment. You don't want to startle people and make them worry about you. I had all sorts of thoughts about it afterwards. How clever I had been, not trying to break my fall! I would probably have broken an arm or leg. People said you shouldn't try to break a fall. Relax! I also thought that I had renewed an intimate connection with France . . . it was like being in the war. On further thought, I preferred falling down the stairs.

As we walked from the Métro to the entrance to Père-Lachaise I felt exhilarated and thought of jokes I could make about my adventure. Miriam heard them tolerantly. She didn't see anything funny about it.

Père-Lachaise would lighten anyone's spirits—it must be the most cheerful graveyard in the world. It is an honor to be buried there, but the arrangements are perfectly democratic: eminent men and women and nonentities lie side by side, and everyone gets along splendidly . . . bankers, civil servants, professional men,

bankrupts, card sharps, poets. A general who put down the Berbers may have an inexpensive gravestone . . . the rich grocer lying only a few feet away has a superb monument. In death some have let their imagination run riot, or their relatives have done it for them. A monument that is a cross between an obelisk and a factory chimney rises forty feet in the air. One expects to see it belching smoke.

Since I was here last the tombs of Molière and La Fontaine, which are side by side, appear to have been refurbished . . . twin slabs of marble resting on marble legs, like coffee tables. A group of tourists made it impossible to get by. Their guide was explaining who Molière and La Fontaine were. We took another path and came on another gathering . . . this at the grave of Jim Morrison, the rock star who died of a drug overdose. A young woman was leaning over the gravestone, draped fancifully, and another woman was taking her picture. For *Vogue* or *Elle* perhaps. The grave was scattered with tributes: beer cans, cigarette butts, scraps of paper. Messages from his fans . . . "I want to see you. Please. Meet me at the corner of Boul' Mich and St.-Germain-des-Prés on March 15 at four p.m. I have long black hair and I am five foot two. Maryjane Llewelyn."

Père-Lachaise isn't just a cemetery, it is a city within a city. The walks at the foot of the hill are laid out in parallel lines, like city blocks, then they climb and go wandering. You come across Chopin by accident. You could wander in Père-Lachaise for hours. The people of Paris come here on weekends and holidays to walk and gaze.

A black slab marks the grave of Proust. It bears the names of his parents and other members of the family. There is scarcely enough room for them to be lying side by side—they appear to have been buried in layers, one on top of the other. We visited Apollinaire, Balzac, and Gérard de Nerval who is right across the walk from Balzac. What can they find to say to each other, the novelist with an enormous appetite for life and the poet who hanged himself from a lamppost?

We had lunch at a brasserie outside the cemetery, and fell into conversation with a French couple at the next table. The man asked if we'd seen the "wall of the *fedérés*." No, we hadn't. We must see it, he said. So after lunch we walked along the wall until we came to the place, a stretch pocked with bullet holes and with

sculptured faces coming out of the wall . . . thin, bearded faces with calm expressions, other faces contorted in fear and horror.

In March of 1871, Republicans of the far Left attempted to seize the government. Barricades went up, red flags appeared, and there was fighting in the streets. On May 21 troops from Versailles entered the city and the insurrection was put down. If you had a bruise on your shoulder it showed that you had been firing a rifle. The revolutionaries, men, women, and children were roped together and marched through the streets. "You have heard that I am cruel," General Galliffet told them. "I am more cruel than you can imagine." They were shot and thrown into mass graves. It is said that citizens of Paris looked on, laughing and twirling their umbrellas, while this was being done.

The sculpture is by Paul Moreau-Vaulhier—it was made thirty-eight years after the event. He had been carried away by his bullet holes—they were all over the wall, to a height of nine or ten feet. A sentence by Victor Hugo was appended: "What we were asking of the future, what we want from it is justice—it is not vengeance." Well, maybe, but when the Communists seized power in Russia they would remember the events of '71. No doubt this made it easier for them to shoot their prisoners.

We returned to the Cézanne exhibition at two on a weekday, and were pleasantly surprised to find that the wait outside the building was only forty minutes. When you were inside, however, the crowd was overwhelming—you could hardly see the paintings. The backs of heads were what you saw. I found that by stationing yourself in front of a painting you could manage to see it for a few seconds before another head came along. Why do people go to these exhibitions?

When I spoke about this, on my return to New York where a Vermeer exhibition had been closed for lack of funds, a friend said, "I remember when the Rembrandt *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer* was purchased by the Met. There was a line that went around the block. Now you can go and look at it as long as you like, and there probably won't be another person in the room."

These big exhibitions don't appeal to those who care about art, but to those who want to be where the news is happening. Others have seen it and therefore they must too . . . right now. Next week may be too late. A few days after visiting the Cézanne exhibition

we went to the Louvre, and on the top floor there was an exhibition of modern paintings—scanty, but on one wall there was a Cézanne *L'Estaque, Effets du Soir*, a view of rocks and sea, next to a Monet *Glaçons sur la Seine à Bougival*, ice floes on the Seine. The Cézanne was as fine as anything in the big exhibition, and there wasn't a head between.

Yolande, Serge Fauchereau's wife, is the editor of *Missives*, a literary review published by the Post Office. Try to imagine the Post Office of the United States having anything like that, and what some members of Congress would say! She had found a publisher for the selection of my poems that Serge was translating. This was why Miriam and I were in Paris, so I could work with Serge on the French edition. To explain the meaning of a word in a letter could take paragraphs and the result still not be right, but sitting down together we would be able to arrive at a right shade of meaning with a shake of the head for no, a nod for yes.

There was another reason: I had been translating French poems into English for an anthology to be titled *Modern Poets of France*. I wanted Serge to look at the table of contents and tell me if there were any poet I had excluded whom he felt absolutely I must include. Also there were some lines that continued to puzzle me. For example, Larbaud spoke of "Le visage *vaporisé* au Portugal." What did that mean? Serge considered . . . then said "Ah!" and made motions of spraying his face with perfume from an atomizer.

When I was a boy I was taught French by a schoolmaster such as you might have seen on the stage: portly, with a round face and a pepper-gray moustache. He was not given to displays of emotion—he was the other kind of Frenchman. He registered disapproval by saying nothing, and his stare was devastating. With Mr. Wiehen I studied fables by La Fontaine and plays by Molière, Racine, and Beaumarchais.

We could study a region of France for the examination that would be set and graded in England. The assigned text had photographs of water and reeds. Mr. Wiehen did not insist on our reading this book. There was also a book by Leon Blum in which he spoke of a "minister without portfolio." I visualized a man who had lost his briefcase and been looking for it ever since. This work, too, Mr. Wiehen, after going over a few pages with us, read

in no further. The examination offered a certain freedom of choice: we could answer the questions that dealt with poetry and ignore the others.

My interest in French was renewed when, many years later, I taught in an American university. American authors had learned from the French. In 1908 the American poet Ezra Pound arrived in London. He had begun by studying Provençal poets. Then T. S. Eliot arrived—he had modernized himself, as Pound put it, by reading the French Symbolists.

In France after the failed revolution of 1848 republicanism was suppressed. In the years that followed, the poets Gautier and Baudelaire, the novelist Flaubert, spoke for individuals who had replaced a belief in the possibility of reform with a belief in what they themselves imagined. To be “modern” implied a belief in the supreme reality of the work of art.

The British, on the other hand, believed in their institutions as repositories of wisdom. Their writers and artists were not at odds with the middle class as were these French writers and artists. They shared the patriotic feelings of the nation as a whole. Having an Empire proved that the British way was right . . . some would have said, divinely ordained. The British thought of art as a diversion, though sometimes useful to refer to in a national emergency. This view continued into the twentieth century. During the Second World War, Winston Churchill recited “Say not the struggle naught availeth” in Parliament. He was speaking, I believe, of Lend Lease.

An American poet once wrote:

I swear I begin to see the meaning of these things,
It is not the earth, it is not America who is so great,
It is I who am great or to be great, it is You up there, or any
one,
It is to walk rapidly through civilizations, governments,
theories,
Through poems, pageants, shows, to form individuals.

I think one is more likely to find what Whitman called “the meaning of these things” under a republican form of government than under a monarchy and the class system it entails—the belief that some people have been divinely appointed to consider themselves more deserving than others.

La Rochelle
October 24

To La Rochelle by train, in order to see more than Paris . . . green and brown fields and lines of poplars. We checked in at Le Mercure. After stowing our baggage we walked around the port to the twin towers that guard the entrance. The streets were like thousands of others in Europe, narrow with small, neat shops.

We were lucky—the next day, Wednesday, was market day. We looked at the stalls of vegetables and went into the roofed market with its display of meat—whole pigs!—and piles of fish and crustaceans. I photographed a table of red fish . . . a still life by Chardin. There were small snails in shells, periwinkles, like the ones I remember as a child in Jamaica. They clung to the pilings in the sea—we never thought of eating such things.

We had Campari and sodas at one of the cafés that line the port. The towers stand one to each side of the entrance. In the old days a heavy chain was suspended from them and slung across the entrance so that no enemy ship could enter. During the Second World War La Rochelle was a nest of German submarines.

School had let out . . . a group of girls stood chatting. Suddenly they all set off like starlings and vanished. There were three young men . . . another appeared. They called to him and he crossed the street and joined them. Another drove up on a motorcycle. He did not dismount but sat in the saddle and exchanged a few words. They were not in a hurry, serene in their powers of seduction. I would have found it as impossible to know what these young people thought as it would have been for an enemy ship to break the chain and enter La Rochelle.

We had dinner in the evening at a little restaurant, Le Saint Sauveur, that we had noticed in our wandering. The room was decorated with paintings by the husband of the woman who owned the establishment. Miriam ordered “sole farcie aux mets de crabes” (98 Fr.), and for dessert “poire au chocolat.” I had bouillabaisse (88 Fr.). Eating it was like taking a bath in the Atlantic. I knew that when I got back to Paris Serge would say that bouillabaisse in La Rochelle wasn’t like the bouillabaisse of Marseilles, but it was fine, and I didn’t have to go all the way to Marseilles. For dessert, “mousse au chocolat.” With wine and coffee the meal cost 348 Fr., service not included but “what you

wish to give." I translated the bill as \$72 American, a better dinner than we could have had at the French restaurant back home, and far less expensive.

Poitiers
October 26

There was talk of a railway strike, but we left on time and traveled by green fields with woods in the distance, standing in compact regiments, and poplars, lots of poplars in straight lines or bunches, like Parisian women of fashion, slender branches reaching up like arms to adjust their hair.

Poitiers is an old town . . . but so are most of the towns in France. Poitiers, however, was once the residence of a pope and has some ancient churches. The town stands on a hill. In spite of its eminence, the pollution from automobile and bus and truck exhausts, and cigarettes, is terrific.

We checked in at the Grand Hôtel de l'Europe. Then walked around the middle of town and visited churches. Notre Dame la Grande dates back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. There is a parish church, built over the burial place of the fourth century bishop, Hilary, who was sainted. The church was enormous, but the stones looked new and the stained glass was poor, with crudely drawn figures. No wonder, for the original church was destroyed in the Revolution of '89. The present church is a mammoth nineteenth-century reconstruction.

We ate dinner in a restaurant across the street from the Grand Hotel. It was Teutonic, specializing in big platters of sausage and sauerkraut, or heaps of shellfish, and steins of beer. Then we went and sat in the park that faced the Town Hall. This was where the people came in the evening. We watched them going by. I spoke to Miriam about the young girls we had seen in La Rochelle who set off suddenly like a flock of birds for some mysterious reason. She said there was nothing mysterious about it—they walked fast so as not to be accosted. Young girls have a lot to worry about.

Six passed before us walking in a leisurely fashion. "The more there are, the slower the pace can be. Sometimes they can even start up with someone, knowing they can't be taken up on it." One was by herself, smoking a cigarette as she walked, "She's older, she's cool. She's meeting a friend somewhere." She said, "It

doesn't smell like America. The tobacco, the cars . . . it makes me feel very foreign."

We returned to the Grand Hôtel de l'Europe. Who would deny that it was grand? Forget the musty smell of the room that couldn't wait for you to leave. It was a grand hotel if you thought of the history of France . . . a château on the Loire, a painting by Chardin. It was grand in the fashion of Molière playing *Le Malade Imaginaire* as he was dying. And it wasn't just the grand hotel of France—it had catered to the nobility of Europe, and socialists too. It was the *Inferno* and a Beethoven quartet. Stay the soul with art. Recline on the bed of culture. If all you want is to dream, these things may serve their purpose—memory is the mother of the muses.

But she is not your muse. For her you must go to the eternal present. "Nearly all our originality," Baudelaire said, "comes from the stamp that the present impresses on our sensations." The muse is the glow of light from the restaurant across the street, the shadows and voices of men and women passing in the dark.

Paris
October 27

We were back at Serge and Yolande's house in Villejuif. In the afternoon we took the Métro to Palais Royal to meet Aubert Lemeland who had set two of my poems to music for his *Songs for the Dead Soldiers*. He treated us to tea at a café across the street from the Comédie Française. He had added an epilogue to the *Songs*—it was now in three parts and ran for an hour. He talked about his experiences during the Normandy invasion. They lived in a village that was close to the fighting, and his parents were frightened for the safety of his brother and himself. His father had been in the Great War, all the way through, including Chemin des Dames. He was consulted by the Americans when they came to Glatigny. Aubert and his brother rode with their father in a jeep. The American soldiers were like big brothers.

In the evening Serge and Yolande had dinner guests: a painter, Telemaque, who was born in Haiti but had lived in France most of his life, and a French painter named Rancillac. Telemaque asked why, since Americans hated the French so much, French intellectuals had such a great success in the States.

I spoke about the appeal of the French intellectuals, as he called them. Derrida and de Man taught that there was nothing “beyond language,” no truth—everything was a game played with words. This appealed to American academics who led sheltered lives. Besides, the kind of people in the States who gravitated to the humanities had only a smattering of learning and were impressed by Europeans who had read Latin and Greek. But where did Telemaque get the idea that the French were hated? This struck both Serge and myself as strange.

Telemaque and Rancillac said that France was more “democratic” than the United States—the government didn’t punish people for their opinions, didn’t try to control the citizens, as happened in the States. The government was only concerned to maintain order. I said that this was to draw a very fine line, between maintaining order and controlling the people. And how about the government’s censorship of TV and radio, et cetera? All this could be said to be only “maintaining order.”

They said that in the United States when you were old you had no means of support. I told them about social security and Medicare, but they didn’t want to believe it, so I went and got my Medicare card and showed it to them. There is a lot of “disinformation” about the U.S. in Europe. It used to be poured out by the Soviet Union, and there are still those, especially among writers, artists and other “intellectuals” of the older generation, who will swallow any story that is anti-American.

Telemaque chain-smoked cigarettes without regard for anyone at the table, as the French do. Miriam slipped away at eleven—she was tired, and had been through a dangerous siege with a cold. The painters left at one, and the rest of us went to bed.

Two days later Miriam flew back to the States. I stayed on to work with Serge on his translations of my poems, and did what I usually do when I am alone in Paris. I went to museums and bookstores. I walked along the Seine and took pictures.

The people in the Office of Culture who decide such things have broken up the exhibition of Impressionists at the Jeu de Paume and scattered the paintings across Paris. This distributes the tourists also and is no doubt good for the economy of other museums. And it is safer for the paintings in a world where terrorists are walking around like the Professor in *The Secret Agent*,

rigged to blow themselves up with everything around them. Some of the paintings have been taken only a short distance away, to the twin building, the Orangerie, on the other side of the park. But the van Goghs and Gauguins have been removed further off—you would have to find them. And where is the naked lady on the grass, with men lounging around her? She is looking at you as though this were the most normal thing in the world. The visitors from other lands who received from *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* an impression of what life in Paris is like must be missing her sorely.

One effect of the distribution was to carry me to the Petit Palais, a museum I would never have thought of visiting in former times. This is a curious collection, ranging from small masterpieces to large examples of Firehouse Art: on the one hand, Rembrandt's *Portrait of the Artist in Oriental Costume*, with a dog with curly hair and a pensive expression—on the other hand, Henri Philipoteaux's *Lamartine Rejecting the Red Flag in 1848*, and a large canvas by Jean-Joseph Weerts, dated 1895, that shows a French cavalryman with a breastplate lying dead beneath a dead horse. He is holding up the broken staff of a flag. Above this rises Jesus crucified. Those who insist on art being great miss many things.

Everyone knows Rembrandt, but do you know Heindrick Pot (1600–1665)? The Petit Palais has a *Portrait d'homme* by this Flemish painter that is as fine as a Rembrandt . . . the man is sitting in a weary posture, with a musing, faraway expression. The most amazing picture has to be Courbet's *Le Sommeil*, dated 1866, a large painting of two naked women, brunette and red, sleeping with limbs entwined—it wipes out everything else in the nineteenth century. I stood for a long time before Armand Guillaumin's *The Road to the Valley*. The road as it descended was strangely haunting. There are other discoveries to be made in this museum far off the beaten track.

In the evening I took Serge and Yolande to dinner and L'Odéon to see *Tartuffe*. The director had made a *commedia dell'arte* version, with Orgon running around the stage like one of the Marx brothers. In the scene where Orgon's wife leads Tartuffe on in order to unmask him as a seducer, she had her hands on him, kneading his flesh. She appeared to be more lascivious than he. In the closing scene a fop delivered the eulogy to the King so extravagantly as to make it ridiculous. It was nothing that Molière might have done.

The ticket-holders were as willing to be pleased as an American matinée audience—they applauded when the actors appeared for curtain calls. But not the woman who was sharing our box. She inflated herself and gave great hoots like an owl. People turned around to stare. Her hoots gave me an idea of what it must have been like on the first night of *Hernani* when whole rows were hooting and people came to blows. The French take their theater seriously.

November 1, All Saints' Day

A national holiday. Yolande stayed home from work, and Serge and I worked on translating my poems. There were a few places where it was necessary to solve a problem. For example, in the poem about the U.S. in the fifties I said that the young men were “as smooth as a V-8 engine.” Serge said, “The V-8 is a big engine”—he wanted to substitute the name of an engine with which French readers would be familiar. I said that the engine must be American, and the V-8 was right for the time the poem referred to. Serge accepted my objection.

This raises an important issue. In translating for *Modern Poets of France* I have been wary of trying to “improve” on the originals. Sometimes you may be forced to substitute a word or phrase so that readers in your language will understand, but you have to be careful. Poems are like people—they have a place and time, an atmosphere. And they age.

In the evening Yolande said that it was Serge’s birthday, and produced a huge platter of sea snails, crayfish, and oysters. Afterwards we watched a program on TV about the beginnings of radio. In France, that is . . . I didn’t know the names and faces that appeared at the microphone, reading from a script or singing—men in the suits of the 1930s, women in the dresses of the day. Paris was the capital of a great nation and set the fashion. I thought of the abyss that lay before them. But Serge was in heaven—these were the voices of his childhood.

November 2

My last day in Paris—I would be leaving the next morning. Serge accompanied me to get a refund for the Pléiade edition of

Camus's essays that I had bought "à l'occasion," on sale. Yolande looked in the Gallimard catalogue and found that I had been overcharged 80 francs. The store returned the money without a murmur—the clerk had made a mistake. I was glad to be rid of the book—it had too many pages and was awkward to hold.

Recently I received a "collected poems" by an American poet that was printed in such small type that it was unreadable. Are such books published in the hope that they will win a prize? It won't matter if the judges don't read the work. These days such things are decided on another basis. Does the poet have a reputation? Does he or she represent a trend? Does some important person want this book to have the prize?

Serge took me to see the Passage Verdeau and Passage Jouffroy, the covered galleries Aragon wrote about in *Le Paysan de Paris*. The Surrealists used to come here. There were shops that sold secondhand clothing and discarded objects that gave them ideas for painting and sculpture. If you needed the leg of a mannequin, or a spinning wheel, this was where you might find it. Today the galleries have been gentrified and the prices have risen accordingly.

I had lunch with Serge and the poet Michel Deguy whom I had met when he visited the States. We had a pleasant conversation in the course of which I said that I couldn't write a poem unless there was an experience I could start from. I don't think this went over very well—the contemporary French poetry that I've seen strikes me as hermetic.

After parting from Serge and Deguy I walked over to Notre Dame. The main body of the cathedral had been enclosed with a barrier so that visitors would walk around it. There were plenty of those, chatting as they went in spite of the signs that said "Silence." I found a comparatively quiet area on the left side, facing a blue rose window. The pews here had not been barred. I knelt and prayed for people I cared about and some I didn't. I thought it would not be out of place in these surroundings. I was filled with a sense of well-being and happiness.

MARK JARMAN

A Story of Deep Delight: The Life of Robert Penn Warren

One of the highlights of Joseph Blotner's new, richly detailed, and sympathetic biography of Robert Penn Warren¹ is the story of how in the summer of 1968, when he was sixty-three, Warren began his masterpiece, the poem *Aubudon: A Vision*. Twenty years earlier he had tried to write a poem about John James Audubon, the nineteenth-century American naturalist and ornithologist, famous for his paintings of birds, but was stymied by his own narrative approach. Then, one day, while helping his wife make the bed, Warren reported:

"... one line from this old discarded poem ... came to mind: 'Was not the lost Dauphin,' and suddenly out of that phrase burst the poem. And so a method for doing the whole thing, just like a vision ... by writing at night, going to sleep, and waking up in the morning early—revising by shouting it all out loud in a Land Rover going to Yale. I saw a new way in. Each element of the poem would be a 'shot' on Audubon rather than a narrative. ... The poem is about man and his fate—all along, Aubudon resisted his fate and thought it was evil—a man is supposed to support his family, and so forth. But now he accepts his fate. ... Audubon was the greatest slayer of birds that ever lived: he destroyed beauty in order to create beauty and whet his understanding. Love is knowledge. And then in the end the poem is about Audubon and me."

Much about this anecdote is telling and some of it slightly misleading. Nothing like this seems to have happened during Warren's first marriage, to Emma "Cinina" Brescia. Unhappy and childless, still it lasted from a secret ceremony in 1929 until their divorce in 1951 while Cinina was an inmate in the psychiatric division of New York Hospital. She was a difficult person. An alcoholic given to abusing him publicly, she suffered physical

¹ ROBERT PENN WARREN: A Biography, by *Joseph Blotner*. Random House. \$35.00.

collapses whenever he published a new book and often spent months bedridden. Warren's second marriage, in 1952, to the novelist Eleanor Clark, with whom he had two children, *was* happy. One can imagine that it was a perfectly normal thing for him to receive poetic inspiration while doing a simple domestic task, like making a bed, with her. On the other hand, nothing in his biography suggests that, like Audubon, Warren "destroyed beauty in order to create beauty." When the time came to make his break with Cinina (he did so at her request), he never saw her again. The absoluteness of that break, after twenty years of marriage, is notable.

But Warren's connection with Audubon occurs at other levels, as the biography shows, one of which was an enormous, even staggering capacity to work. During his first marriage, Robert Penn Warren taught at Southwestern College, Vanderbilt University, Louisiana State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Minnesota. He wrote and published a biography of John Brown, three books of poems, the influential textbook *Understanding Poetry* in collaboration with Cleanth Brooks, and four novels, including his most famous, *All the King's Men*, which was based on Huey Long's dynasty in Louisiana. Also with Brooks, he founded and edited *The Southern Review*. During his second marriage, though the success of *All the King's Men* and his subsequent novels allowed him to teach less (he taught on and off at Yale until the 1970s), he continued his remarkable productivity, writing fiction, nonfiction, literary criticism, and poetry, until the last year of his life when pain from osteoarthritis and prostate cancer made it impossible for him to work. It would be fair to say that the fate he accepted was his own literary genius. It persisted through domestic strife and domestic tranquillity.

Robert Penn Warren was born in 1905 in Guthrie, Kentucky, a descendant on his mother's side of William Penn, and died in 1989 in Fairfield, Connecticut. His father, with whom he maintained an affectionate but distant relationship all his life, was a shopkeeper and wrote poetry secretly, having had some of it published by a vanity press. Both his grandfathers fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, and one of them, Gabriel Thomas Penn, lived to tell his grandson stories about that time. Southern Kentucky, where Guthrie is located, has much in common with Middle Tennessee, where Warren attended

Vanderbilt University in Nashville at the age of sixteen, and his affinity for the region never changed, even though he eventually made his home in the Northeast and returned to the South only to visit. Throughout his life he claimed to love the South and to wish that he had not been made to live in exile, like so many Southern intellectuals of his generation. When he came to Nashville to attend college, he took on the name Red and made friends with an older student, Allen Tate, another Kentuckian, who later called Warren, "the most gifted person I have ever known." Warren took classes with the poet and critic John Crowe Ransom, whom Blotner calls a father surrogate. He also took a course from the notorious martinet Edwin Mims, for whom he memorized 3000 lines of poetry, 2500 more than required. When *The Fugitive: A Journal of Poetry* was founded, he was invited to submit work. Tate noted his extraordinary talent as a poet, though he was only eighteen years old, declaring that he above all of the Fugitives was capable of "power." Warren's reading, like his memory, was prodigious, and he pushed himself to exhaustion. A childhood accident had blinded his left eye, and when his incessant reading threatened the vision in his good eye, depression coupled with fatigue from studying led him to try suicide with a towel soaked in chloroform. A suicide note expressed his fear that he would not make a poet. Yet at the age of twenty he made graduate student at UC Berkeley, published fifteen pages of poetry in the widely acclaimed *Fugitives: An Anthology of Verse*, and was awarded a Rhodes scholarship. Before the age of twenty-five, he had published *John Brown, The Making of a Martyr*, which won a rave review from H. L. Mencken. Just as importantly, he was included in *I'll Take My Stand*, the collection of reactionary essays by the Agrarians who took their stand against the inevitable changes they saw threatening the Southern way of life. Warren's essay, "The Briar Patch," an argument for a separate but equal status for the Negro, would haunt him for the rest of his career, even after he published his enlightened studies of the Civil Rights Movement, *Segregation* in 1956 and *Who Speaks for the Negro* in 1965.

Early on, then, it was clear that Warren would be a man of letters. Those who knew him believed he would be preeminent, as indeed he turned out to be. No other American writer ever succeeded in so many different genres. *All the King's Men* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1947; *Promises: Poems 1954-1956* won

the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1958 and *Now and Then* won it in 1979. His stage adaptation of *All the King's Men* was produced in New York. Later the composer Carlisle Floyd made it into an opera. Random House published all ten of Warren's novels, and kept one of them, *World Enough and Time*, in hardback editions for over twenty years. *All the King's Men* and *Band of Angels* were made into motion pictures, the former winning the Academy Award for best picture of the year. When *All the King's Men*, which had been translated into some nineteen languages, was published in the Soviet Union, the story of Willie Stark's gangster socialism became hugely popular. Warren was called on by *Life* magazine to provide essays on the Civil War and Civil Rights. It was he who urged the filmmaker Ken Burns, when he was in the earliest stages of planning his documentary on the Civil War, to read Shelby Foote's narrative history of the war. Warren's understanding of American history pervaded his work, giving it an epic dimension displayed in his novels, and also in his poetry. A master of the lyric, he also published three book-length poems, *Brother to Dragons*, *Audubon: A Vision*, and *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*. Finally, and it may be most significantly, *Understanding Poetry*, the textbook he co-authored with Cleanth Brooks when both taught at LSU in the 1930s, formed the poetic canon for generations of American readers. It was the instrument by which the New Criticism established itself in the American academy for over forty years as the foremost critical approach to literature.

Warren was showered with honors throughout his career, including being named twice as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, the second time as America's first Poet Laureate in 1986. Yet he never enjoyed the celebrity of a figure like Norman Mailer or Allen Ginsberg. Nevertheless, for those who knew them, both his name and his face had an inherent magic that fame only enhanced. His middle name was resonant with American history while at the same time underlining Warren's calling. From early manhood his face looked weather-beaten, and later took on the cragginess of an old Scottish chieftain. Friends referred to it in repose as "the mask." In the last twenty years of his life, when his poetry enjoyed a renaissance that many compared to the later work of W. B. Yeats, Warren's visage, appearing every other year on a volume of highly publicized poetry, became equated with American letters. In the

dawning age when image alone would be important, Warren not only looked the part but lived it.

Joseph Blotner narrates Warren's career loyally, doing his best to make drama out of the uneventfulness of a successful writer's life. During Warren's first marriage, Cinina's antics provide most of the action. His friends formed a standing committee that was meant to save him from her. But the events of his second marriage merely include the births of his children, the frequent sojourns in Europe (Warren preferred to write in landscapes of natural beauty in Italy and France), various family accidents and mishaps (his daughter Rosanna survived a plane crash in Genoa), the deaths of close friends (Allen Tate, Katherine Anne Porter), and the eventual breakdown of his health. Indeed, the story of his last months and his stoic endurance is enough to inspire tears. Yet what is it that makes his life inherently interesting? As one of the Fugitives and the second generation of Modernists, as a major literary figure whose life and associations intersected with other prominent figures, including Ralph Ellison and William Styron, and as a writer who made much of American history the subject of his work, Warren deserves our attention. But as if to affirm his own New Critical principles, that attention may be better focused on the work, than on the life.

Robert Penn Warren's fame nationally and internationally rested on the success of his fiction. From his first novel, *Night Rider*, published in 1939, to his last, *A Place to Come To*, published in 1977, he was always either writing a novel or planning one, even in periods of intense poetic activity or other literary work. Blotner summarizes the plot of each novel, growing increasingly critical as Warren, changing with the times, includes more explicit sex and coarser language. He is also critical of Warren's tendency toward the melodramatic, a reservation John Crowe Ransom shared when appraising Warren's earliest fiction (Ransom preferred his poetry). Blotner notices the father and son theme running through Warren's fiction and associates it with Warren's own relationship with his father, but this theme is only a shadowy one in the story of Jack Burden and Willie Stark, for example. One wishes that there were more about Willie Stark and less about Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*, in part because we know Stark is based on a historical figure, but mainly because Stark makes things happen when he is on stage. In *World Enough*

and Time, Jeremiah Beaumont at the behest of his lover Rachel Jordan murders Rachel's seducer, Colonel Fort, in an act of Oedipal rivalry. But isn't it really Rachel Jordan who interests us? A fascinating creation, Rachel Jordan displays a dissatisfaction of haunting intensity, and yet she is underdeveloped and dispatched conventionally as a suicide. In the end, the inner conflicts of Warren's "sons" are not compelling. And in the end, I am not sure if the novels will last. Certainly *All the King's Men*, as a political novel, will remain of historical interest, as it portrays the drama of Huey Long's failed vision. But like the writing in Thomas Hardy's novels, to which they have been compared, the writing in Warren's breaks down, the plot machinery creaks, and what remains are terrific scenes, like the amputation in *Band of Angels* or the opening paragraph of *A Place to Come To*. The beginning of *All the King's Men* rivals the description of the heath in *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

To get there you follow Highway 58, going northeast out of the city, and it is a good highway and new. Or was new, that day we went up it. You look up the highway and it is straight for miles, coming at you, with the black line down the center coming at and at you, black and slick and tarry-shining against the white of the slab, and the heat dazzles up from the white slab so that only the black line is clear, coming at you with the whine of the tires, and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself and you'll come to just at the moment when the right front wheel hooks over into the black dirt shoulder off the slab, and you'll try to jerk her back on but you can't because the slab is high like a curb, and maybe you'll try to reach to turn off the ignition just as she starts the dive. But you won't make it, of course.

When Warren is considered with his contemporaries, the other fiction writers of the Southern renaissance, ranging from William Faulkner to Flannery O'Connor and including Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Peter Taylor, his historical range is greater, but that is all.

Warren is best when he is trying to understand the meaning of historical events, because it relates to his larger quest to find meaning in existence. This search made him an excellent journalist. To know how intellectuals, particularly Southern intellectuals, thought about Civil Rights in the 1950s and 1960s, to know,

in fact, how all sorts of economic and social classes and races thought about each other in that era, reading *Segregation* and *Who Speaks for the Negro* is like opening time capsules. After an initial shock, the utter genuineness of the reportage, thanks to Warren's narrative gift, makes you ask with him, "What's coming?" In *Segregation* he asks this question of an Episcopal rector "in the Deep South," and the following memorable passage occurs.

He has just told me that when he first came down from the North, a generation back, his bishop had explained it all to him, how the Negroes' skull capacity was limited. But as he has said, brain power isn't everything, there's justice, and not a member of his congregation wasn't for conviction in the Till case.

"But the Negro has to be improved before integration," he says. "Take their morals, we are gradually improving the standard of morality and decency."

The conversation veers, we take a longer view. "Well, anthropologically speaking," he says, "the solution will be absorption, the Negro will disappear."

I ask how this is happening.

"Low-class people, immoral people, libertines, wastrels, prostitutes and such," he says.

I ask if, in that case, the raising of the moral level of the Negro does not prevent, or delay, what he says is the solution.

The conversation goes into a blur.

Leaving the South after doing his research, Warren writes, "I feel the surge of relief. But I know what the relief really is. It is the relief from responsibility." And he continues with a devastating evaluation of white privilege that still rings true.

Now you may eat the bread of the Pharisee and read in the morning paper, with only a trace of irony, how out of an ultimate misery of rejection some Puerto Rican school boys—or is it Jews or Negroes or Italians?—who call themselves something grand, The Red Eagles or the Silver Avengers, have stabbed another boy to death, or raped a girl, or trampled an old man into a bloody mire. If you can afford it, you will, according to the local mores, send your child to a private school, where there will be, of course, a couple of Negro children on exhibit. And that delightful little Chinese girl who is so good at dramatics. Or is it finger painting?

Yes, you know what the relief is. It is the flight from the reality you were born to.

Robert Penn Warren, like his contemporary W. H. Auden, shows his Modernist credentials in his quest for meaning. It was this that estranged him from the Post-Modernist tendencies at Yale in the 1970s. His quest is as real as that of any of the other Modernists, but his particular question and answer are uniquely his own. A nonbeliever who knew that his inability to believe was akin to his inability to enjoy music, still, throughout his career, he asked the great question of St. Augustine: What is Time? The closest he came to an answer was to conclude that time is a story. Nowhere is this truth more apparent than in the form and rhythm of poetry, and it was at poetry that Warren excelled.

Warren's major literary criticism is of poetry, and includes his great essay on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "A Poem of Pure Imagination." Though his textbook *Understanding Poetry* has been supplanted, most poetry textbooks have simply built on its foundations. Currently, *Understanding Poetry*, along with the New Criticism, waits for the academy to come to its senses and read literature again for what it says. Fortunately, the so-called new historicism is taking criticism back to where it was in the early part of the century, to the old historicism, so that a time may come—it may already be with us—when it will be necessary not only to teach people to read, but to remember that, thanks to Robert Penn Warren, we used to know how.

Once one knows Warren's poetry, one can see where the real artistry is taking place; as with Hardy's poetry, it is often with the same or similar characters as one finds in his fiction. "The Ballad of Billie Potts," *Brother to Dragons*, and *Audubon: A Vision* are three of the best long poems in American literature. All deal with nineteenth-century figures from Warren's section of Kentucky. Warren invented a storytelling rhetoric, relaxing the strictness of traditional meter, and created a stylized voice that travels among levels of diction, ranging from the crudest backcountry dialect to the grandest of high Modernist expression. In "The Ballad of Billie Potts," the murderous thief Billie Potts says, "'Git down, friend, and take yore ease!'" while moving in a "massive passion colder than any love." *Audubon: A Vision* may be the most influential poem of the last third of the twentieth century, at least for that group of younger American poets who have experimented with the long poem which employs narrative. The final passage has left its mark on a generation of American poets.

Tell me a story.

In this century, and moment, of mania,
Tell me a story.

Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.

The name of the story will be Time,
But you must not pronounce its name.

Tell me a story of deep delight.

Poets ranging from Garrett Hongo to Andrew Hudgins, Rita Dove to Robert McDowell, Sydney Lea to T. R. Hummer, Kate Daniels to Dave Smith have responded to that request. Many know the passage by heart.

Warren seemed to know from the beginning that his theme was the nature of time. His way of talking about it in his poetry was to change very little, growing only by the enhancement of years and maturity. What is time? He tells us again and again that time is a story of the world. And the world is only what it is. His advice is to walk in it, to love it, to make it a story.

Robert Penn Warren is one of the names by which we will know American literature, especially American poetry, of this century. An image that remains with me, after finishing his biography, is one of him at the end of his life, when he was too ill to work, listening to his daughter reading Dante's *Commedia* to him. He remains important for many reasons, not least because, thanks to Joseph Blotner, we can regard the life of a great literary figure with admiration rather than disappointment.

KAREN WILKIN

Will Georges Braque Ever Get His Due?

Georges Braque's pivotal role in the Cubist adventure was at last defined by the Museum of Modern Art's exemplary "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism," which established Braque not merely as Picasso's equal, but as a frequent leader when the two young artists scaled the heights of Modernism "roped together like mountain climbers." In his last decades, Braque became a kind of French national treasure, invited to decorate a ceiling of the Louvre and becoming the first living artist ever accorded a one-man exhibition in that august museum. When Braque died in 1963, at eighty-one, André Malraux, then minister of culture, delivered the funeral oration in the Cour Carrée of the Louvre. Yet while Braque's position as a paradigmatic Modernist is undisputed, he remains misunderstood and despite his fame and his acknowledged historical importance, oddly underappreciated.

Perhaps this is because he never captured the popular imagination. Braque is the docudrama writer's nightmare, an unflashy artist's artist who led a life of astonishing dullness: no familial resistance to his becoming a painter, no struggle for recognition, no flight to the South Seas, no severed ear, no discarded mistresses, no embittered heirs, no scandals, no revealing journals. Braque's childless marriage to Marcelle Lapré was by all accounts happy and lasted for half a century. Except for about a dozen years spent in bohemian Montmartre and its environs, the couple lived in a substantial house and studio, designed for them by the architect Auguste Perret, in sedate Montparnasse. Summers found them in Varengeville, on the coast of Normandy, where Braque spent his boyhood.

Only Giorgio Morandi, who never married and spent his entire life on the same street in Bologna, seems to have had a more uneventful existence, living and working in the family apartment,

attended by three unmarried sisters, although Morandi's carefully cultivated reclusiveness adds mystery to his legend. The most dramatic event in Braque's life was his being badly wounded in World War I. The real excitement of his history is to be found in his art—inventing Cubism and changing the course of Western art, for starters—dazzling, indeed, if you care about painting and the power of human inventiveness, but not the stuff of best-selling novels or television mini-series.

Braque demands to be judged by his work. Not surprisingly, over his long career, he produced uninspired pictures as well as brilliant ones, but when he fails, he does so primarily in relation to the high standard set by his own finest work, and it is by his own highest level that he must be measured. Conventional wisdom holds that Braque was most often at his best during his collaboration with Picasso, but while this partnership was obviously essential to the evolution of his art—unlike his mercurial “pard,” Braque spoke the language of Cubism for the rest of his life—the six-year adventure with Picasso occupied only a fraction of a sixty-year career. That Braque painted the majority of his finest pictures in this brief period is an opinion untenable for anyone who has looked attentively at his work as a whole.

Not that it has been easy to form an accurate impression of Braque's achievement; you had to work at it. The twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, in 1988, provoked a number of retrospectives, including a rather hit or miss effort at the Guggenheim; a more consistent survey was seen at the Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, in 1994. Some recent shows have focused on particular aspects of Braque's work, perhaps most notably, “Pioneering Cubism,” in 1989. The following year, a survey of the painter's still lifes and interiors, chosen by John Golding, toured England, while in the U.S., “The Fauve Landscape,” organized by the Los Angeles County Museum, set Braque's pre-Cubist works in context. But while every facet of Picasso's enormous oeuvre has been scrutinized and re-evaluated, including (or especially) his problematic, often self-indulgent late works, Braque remains best known for what he accomplished before he was forty—an impressive body of work, certainly, but not the whole story. All of which is reason to applaud the long overdue exhibition, “Braque: The Late Works,” selected by John Golding, first seen last winter at the

Royal Academy, London, and on view in Houston, at the Menil Collection, from April 25 to August 31.

The show was both absolutely wonderful and a missed opportunity. It was wonderful because it assembled more than forty significant paintings from the last two decades of Braque's long, productive life and reunited key works from the principal series—Billiard Tables, Studios, and Birds—that preoccupied the painter from the mid-1940s on. But for all its virtues, the exhibition was neither definitive nor wholly comprehensive. The ideal Braque exhibition has yet to mounted. Unfortunately, museum politics and loan policies being what they are, it seems unlikely that anyone will put together another major Braque show any time soon, which means that this limited, albeit thoughtful effort will be the last word on the painter for the foreseeable future.

Still, the exhibition included so many wonderful pictures, including little-known works from private collections, that it seems mean-spirited and greedy to complain. Braque's deliberately circumscribed themes were all accounted for: still lifes, interiors of the studio and the living room, occasional views of the terrace outside his house or, especially in his last years, of the fields and seashore of Varengeville. There were iconic pictures and obscure ones, intimate paintings and grand ones, canvases that dazzled with the authority of a lifetime's accumulated experience—the best kind of “old man's art”—and others that attested to the limitations of age. The main problem with Golding's selection was that major groupings were often represented by only one or a few pictures, frustrating those of us avid for firsthand comparisons.

The earliest work in the show was painted at the beginning of World War II, in 1941, when Braque was fifty-nine. The painter and his wife remained in Paris during the Occupation, a point of honor for a patriotic Frenchman awarded the Croix de Guerre and made a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur for his ordeal in World War I. Braque's paintings both echo and defy the rigor of these difficult years. The restrictions of a wartime existence have their parallel in still lifes of the early 1940s composed of homely objects—a pitcher, a few flowers, a fish, a lemon, a chunk of sausage—economically evoked with broad planes. Lush surfaces, markedly at odds with the meagre subject matter, are the only obvious link between these pictures and Braque's last prewar

pictures of women playing musical instruments in elaborately patterned interiors. Yet the spare wartime still lifes share the palpable sensuality of the opulent interiors, a tactility that Braque described as “the desire I have always had to touch things and not only to see them.” “If a still life isn’t within reach of my hand,” he explained, “it seems to me that it ceases to be a still life, ceases to be affecting.” (Braque ground his own colors; just as he wanted still life objects within reach of his hand, he wanted his hand in his paint.) Braque disliked efforts to “decode” his works—“What the painter attempts is not to reconstitute an anecdote, but to constitute a pictorial event,” he wrote—yet his austere domestic pictures of the early 1940s seem to invite multiple readings. *The Stove* (1942, Yale University Art Gallery), for example, is not so much a surprisingly naturalistic record of a familiar studio artifact as it is an homage to Delacroix and, more important, to Braque’s beloved Corot. Other works of the period, such as a crusty still life, rough and brown as a Franciscan’s habit, of an earthenware pitcher, a rosary, and a skull, treat symbolic objects as the accoutrements of daily life; related pictures include a small prayer book. Braque denied any intended symbolism, insisting that the skull was a studio prop and that he liked the form of the rosary, but it’s impossible to ignore associations with the traditional *vanitas* theme, filtered through Cézanne’s *memento mori* paintings of skulls and candlesticks, especially since, as many critics have noted, Braque painted skulls only during the war years. In many late still lifes, however, mortality itself is evoked by his fusion of skull and palette by making the palette’s thumbhole and distinctive curves mimic the hollow eye sockets and profile of a flattened cranium.

Within the exhibition, *The Washstand* (1942-44, Phillips Collection), gained an additional layer of meaning through its proximity to a pair of very different pictures from the same period, the rarely seen *Mandolin and Score (The Banjo)* (1941, Collection of Charles and Palmer Ducommun) and the well-known *Large Interior with Palette* (1942, Menil Collection, Houston). The Phillips’ picture jams unprepossessing objects—a washbasin and pitcher, a hairbrush and sponge, a stool, and what may be a radiator—into a constricted rectangle. Only a glimpse of window provides an escape from the narrow, squeezed space. Is this a metaphor, intended or unconscious, for life in an occupied city?

By contrast, the creamy, expansive *Large Interior*, with its elegant, arching drawing, and the lush *Mandolin and Score*, with its delectable cinnabar reds and rosy purples, seem like refutations of wartime austerity. Braque challenges tension and deprivation with fluent line, generous compositions, and seductively disposed pigment.

The end of the war was signalled by the exhibition's *The Living Room (Interior)* (1944, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) completed at Varengeville, soon after Braque was able to return to Normandy after the Liberation. (During the Occupation, he visited the house only briefly.) With its sense of calm and amplitude, *The Living Room* is notably unlike Braque's claustrophobic wartime still lifes. A centralized window, one side flung open, dominates the large horizontal picture. Cool and pale against the warm planes of the interior, this brushy blue-grey expanse is a visual equivalent for air, a sign for openness, breadth, freedom. Since the areas of greatest incident are confined to the periphery, almost pushed out of our field of vision, we are made to concentrate on this unequivocally *painted* non-event in the center of the canvas—the implied void of the window.

The compositional inventiveness of *The Living Room* heralds Braque's main postwar series, the Billiard Tables, painted between 1944 and 1949, with an additional picture completed in 1952, and the celebrated Studios, worked and reworked between 1949 and 1956. (The exhibition's stunning assembly of six of the eight Studios made you long for a larger sampling of the widely dispersed Billiard Tables.) The catalogue, which stresses van Gogh's importance to Braque's late work, suggests a link between the Billiard Tables and the Dutch painter's brilliant *Night Café* (1888, Yale University Art Gallery), yet Braque's approach in his spatially complex series is completely his own. The motif could have resonated for him quite independently. The shifting points of view that a billiards player must adopt as he lines up his shots—evoked by the tabletop's tipped and broken planes in Braque's series—are a functional version of the multiple perceptions of Cubism; as in Cubism, no one viewpoint is the truest or most important. Braque's Billiard Tables could be read as a translation of the game's likeness to simplified Cubist ideas back into Cubist imagery. The series makes clear the painter's genius for evoking specific hues with "non-colors." Instead of the ex-

pected expanse of “billiard cloth green,” Braque deploys a range of ochres, khakis, and browns, and small quantities of dull grey-green, yet somehow greenness dominates. As isolated note of red—a billiard ball—sparks each picture, like the single red accent in a late silver-green Corot landscape.

The strength of the show was its gathering of Braque’s most ambitious late pictures, the Studios. If the painter truly felt, as he wrote in his notebooks, that his art and life became more inseparable as he grew older, then these vast, complex paintings can be called self-portraits. Figures are absent except by implication, as a sculpture or painted image; the painter’s presence is announced by the tools of his trade and by his handiwork. In many of the Studios, the large bird that haunts Braque’s late paintings is woven into a cage of vertical planes—easel? canvases? fragmented space?—an over-scaled denizen of the out-of-doors flattened into a heraldic symbol and shattered by the painting’s unstable darks and lights. Throughout the series, Braque shifts and rearranges the same components, thrusting some to the side, exposing new images and concealing others, as though shuffling a stack of canvases—the piles of pictures in various stages of completion that visitors to his studio always remarked on. Coherent space and even coherent scale are sacrificed to the demands of a new, seamless, richly inflected whole, which Braque described as embodying “the life of objects continuing beyond the canvas.” His studio is a solemn, disorienting interior space where illusion is pitted against actuality, a laboratory in which to test perception. Yet a related picture, one of the surprises of the show, *Composition with Stars* (1954-58, Private Collection), substitutes pure playfulness for the gravitas of the workplace, translating the familiar studio components into an explosion of spotted and dotted color.

The Studios assert Braque’s claim to the Grand Manner, with the self-assurance and single-mindedness that characterize the best of “late style” art. (He declared that he tried “to put all the discoveries of a lifetime” in *Studio VIII*.) Like the great narratives of Poussin, the Studios must be read incrementally: *this* event against *this* against *this*. Braque’s narrative, however, is wholly abstract and exists only in terms of nuances of touch and hue, of smooth paint against crusty, of line against plane. Just as Poussin’s masterpieces depend on virtuoso stagings of complicated philo-

sophical themes, Braque's depend on virtuoso paint handling, a risky proposition that can degenerate into *cuisine*. What saves even Braque's most *cuisiné* canvases is his extraordinary use of color and his ability, particularly in the paintings of his last years, to turn surface inflection into a kind of color.

It's impossible to separate the two. Many of Braque's best pictures are richly textured but nearly monochromatic, ringing changes on sooty greys, brown-blacks, and mahogany browns, with occasional flashes of light. Often, the graininess of textured paint all but obscures color and knits together abrupt planar divisions, pulling disjunctive fragments back to a single, highly inflected surface. That Braque was a consummate painter, a master of translating perceptions and feelings into sensuous stuff moved across the surface of a canvas—albeit stuff thickened with sawdust, ashes, or sand—was evident from the start and persisted throughout his career. Unlike Picasso, Braque was never a depicter of discrete forms, but a translator of the continuity of things and space into the medium of paint. Paint is always autonomous—even when Braque plays visual games by imitating wallpaper or wood grain in a wild conflation of his early training as a decorative painter and his seminal invention of *collage*. The aggressive physicality of Braque's paint tempers his color. Hues are never nameable. Color seems to exist as much by its absence as its presence or by implication. Witness the witty still life, *Sunflowers on the Table* (1946, Reader's Digest Association, Inc.). In an updated version of the famous illusionistic nail and shadow in one of Braque's best-known Cubist still lifes, the tablecloth in *Sunflowers* spills over a *trompe l'oeil* frame (complete with brass label), casting shadows, and generally playing havoc with pictorial conventions. But the most arresting aspect of the picture is its color. Most of the subtly varied yellows that construct the painting are not in the sunflowers themselves, but in surrounding areas. As in the *Billiard Tables*, an overwhelming impression of a dominant color—here yellowness—has less to do with the local color of the main subject—here the flowers, rendered with ochres, off-greens, and only a small amount of “sunflower yellow”—than it does with contrast and association.

It all comes together in one of Braque's last Bird pictures, *In Full Flight* (1956-61, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), a surprisingly compelling meditation on art and artifice. At first, *In Full*

Flight seems typical of Braque's emblematic images of silhouetted birds, but the transforming conceit soon declares itself—a picture, not within, but *upon* the picture, which not only shifts scale by reversing “perspective,” but unequivocally removes the larger bird image from the realm of depiction, by asserting its existence as painted object. Dense pigment brings an expanse of diaphanous sky blue down to earth, “within reach of the hand,” by making it thick and weighty. Braque was well aware of the subversive effect of superimposing the smaller image, with its forthright white border, on the corner of *In Full Flight*. Perhaps it was suggested by those stacks of canvases in his studio. Whatever the source, he seized on the idea to stiffen a picture that he said was “too easy on the eye.”

Braque's last paintings are at once a departure and a reprise of earlier themes. As if recapitulating his own history, he returned in the late 1950s to the landscape and beach motifs he first explored as a novice painter and had last tackled, briefly, twenty years earlier. The exhibition's small, dense landscapes and seascapes were poignant testimony to the aging painter's undiminished powers of invention and his failing physical resources. The cliffs of Varengeville and the fields near his house become primary motifs. The earthbound shapes of farm machines, isolated like relics against thickly brushed backgrounds of wheatfield and sky, replace the airborne silhouettes of overscaled birds. When birds are present, they are reduced to shorthand calligraphy that, coupled with the golden expanses of the fields and the pictures' horizontal formats, invites comparison with late van Gogh. The majority of these works are economical and modest—in the exhibition, *The Plough* (1960, Paule and Adrien Maeght Collection), a large canvas loaded with stabbed, staccato brushmarks, was a rare exception—so that in London, at least, *The Late Works* ended *diminuendo*. If *The Plough's* muscular “pendant,” *The Cultivator* (1961-63, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) had been present, Braque's painterly strength and ambition, even at the end of his life, might have been more visible, but if I were allowed to add one work to the exhibition, it would be what is probably his most eccentric late painting, a playful “portrait” of the bicycle that he rode tirelessly through the countryside as a young man. The picture, which Braque worked on sporadically from 1941 to 1960—most of the period spanned by “The Late Works”—is as

dense and rhythmic as *The Plough*, as zany as *Composition with Stars*, and, with its palette of tender greens, ochres, and violet, as sumptuous as *Mandolin and Score*. Still, "Braque: The Late Works" provided abundant pleasures without it.

The exhibition, however, was not well received in London. Perhaps Braque's pictures are too sensual, too physical, for audiences trained by Duchampian Post-Modernism to value verbally expressed ideas more highly than tangible, wordless equivalents for thought and feeling. Braque's aesthetic was wholly un-Duchampian. "The painting is finished when the idea is obliterated," he wrote. His work depends not on concepts, but on an acute visual intelligence, on expressiveness inseparable from instinct, from the medium of paint itself, and from the history of the making of each picture. None of this is communicated readily in words, but requires direct experience. Direct experience of "Braque: The Late Works," for anyone who pays attention, should make clear that he was not only one of the essential figures in the early days of twentieth-century Modernism, but one of this century's great painters, period.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with perceptive, informative essays and entries by John Golding, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, and Sophie Bowness. The reproductions, at least in the British edition, are inexcusably awful; color is horribly distorted and images are frequently cropped. Will Georges Braque ever get his due?

A. R. AMMONS

Called into Play

Fall fell: so that's it for the leaf poetry:
some flurries have whitened the edges of roads

and lawns: time for that, the snow stuff: &
turkeys and old St. Nick: where am I going to

find something to write about I haven't already
written away: I will have to stop short, look

down, look up, look close, think, think, think:
but in what range should I think: should I

figure colors and outlines, given forms, say
mailboxes, or should I try to plumb what is

behind what and what behind that, deep down
where the surface has lost its semblance: or

should I think personally, such as, this week
seems to have been crafted in hell: what: is

something going on: something besides this
diddledeediddle everyday matter-of-fact: I

could draw up an ancient memory which would
wipe this whole presence away: or I could fill

out my dreams with high syntheses turned into
concrete visionary forms: Lucre could lust

for Luster: bad angels could roar out of perdition
and kill the AIDS vaccine not quite

perfected yet: the gods could get down on
each other; the big gods could fly in from

nebulae unknown: but I'm only me: I have 4
interests—money, poetry, sex, death: I guess

I can jostle those. . . .

DICK ALLEN

The Cove

Something was out there on the lake, just barely
visible in the dark.

I knelt and stared, trying to make it out,
trying to mark

its position relative to mine,
and the picturesque willow, the moon-silvered diving board
on the opposite shore. I listened hard
but heard

no sound from it, although I cupped one ear
as I knelt in the cove,
wondering how far I should take this, if I should seek
someone to row out there with me. Yet it didn't move

or grow darker or lighter. Most shapes,
you know what they are:
a rock-garden serpent, a house in the mist, a man's head,
an evening star,

but not this one. Whatever was out there kept changing
from large to small.

The mass of a wooden coffin surfaced,
then the head of an owl,

a tree limb, a window, a veil—
I couldn't resolve it. I ran one hand through my hair
as I stood up, shrugging. I had just turned 50
and whatever it was that might be floating there

I didn't want it to be. Too much before
that came unbidden into my life
I'd let take me over. I knelt again and stared again.
Something was out there just beyond the cove.

Letter To Ye Feng, His Student Now in Iowa

I remember your paper on the *Tao*,
 How your eyes shone when you got each spelling right.
 One late afternoon we talked for hours
 Outside your dining hall, about the Korean War.
 You wore your red nylon jacket all the time
 To startle Americans, I think, although you never said so.
 Americans are so possessed by things, you told me.
 I asked, "And why do you so love your new computer?"
 You were amazed when I showed you my worn copy
 Of Mao's *Little Red Book*. You couldn't get over it.
 When you got sick, you took a long train ride
 Down to New Jersey, and an acupuncturist.
 I scoffed, but he cured you. You said, "Look!"
 And grinning, jumped up and down on the sidewalk.
 One night you gave a party and respectfully
 Listened to Bruce Springsteen as if he were classical.
 You and your guests sat quietly translating,
 Heads bowed, sipping your beers. I found that very funny.
 At graduation, you insisted on having pictures:
Old American Professor with a Young Chinese
Student in Robes Beside Long Island Sound.
 Now it has been a year. In graduate studies now,
 You wear a white lab coat and study physics far away.
 Physics are mountains to you. You ski down them.
 You love the dawning of numbers, the beautiful flourishes.
 Here, in Bridgeport, on our campus of a hundred trees,
 Xi ling, your friend, reminds me to say "Hello."

TIMOTHY MURPHY

The Temple of Attis

mutato nomine

On Cybele's holy hill
the equinoctial throngs
thrilled to the screech of shrill
flutes and clashing gongs

as priests of Attis wrung
sacrificial necks
or pressed the reckless young
to slash away their sex.

Trampling the wine-dark mud,
they hanged an effigy
smeared with fresh bull's blood
on the sacred cedar tree.

*Now on that hoary hill
where eunuchs laved their hands
in the blood of boy and bull
the throne of Peter stands.*

The Visitant

for Suzanne Doyle

When last this comet crossed the West
Sappho lay on her lover's breast.
How I'd have loved to hear her speak
its praises in Aeolic Greek,
mankind's most majestic tongue
for which Apollo's lyre was strung.
When next this astral visitant
returns from its celestial jaunt,
will jewels in Berenice's Hair
still shine above a planet where
lovers observe a comet's flight,
then light a votive lamp to write
strophes a poet might have sung
when Sappho and the Gods were young?

JEFFREY FRANKLIN

Porc d'Espine

He made a certain squalor in the moonlight
of the Rocky Mountains.

—D.H. Lawrence

At four o'clock
in the mountain's mineral dark
something nameless comes to knock.

It seems to gnaw
the very log my snoring saws
in a rhythm steady and without pause

like long-abiding
and dogged lovers testing,
in some adjacent room, the springs.

To dream's embrace
I yield, then bolt up, braced:
no one but me in this wintry place,

no phone, no gun,
and the very joists of the cabin
shivering: a fitting visitation

for a moonless night
when the bedded veins of anthracite
have dreamed a darkness that fossilizes sight.

Who are you?
The hungry ghost of a Sioux
in war headdress? Wood or laminating glue—

what's your craving,

crouched there with head working
like a self-fed machine set lathing?

No animal I've seen,
more a child's drawing:
a generic, squat, foursquare tureen.

A pineknot knobkerrie
hurled from the porch's safety
sends you off, though in no hurry.

You pig misbegot,
you stubby little ink-pot,
you miniature bull bristling banderillas!

I know who you are,
your nibs dipped in cinnabar,
each tethered by its glint to a star.

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Observations: Middle Age

Cala Padera, Menorca

The wind-fall figs fill out, wedged into the limestone cliffs,
fed on air, a bit of mist. They're only good for the
indeterminate
industries of ants, a few sticks worth of shade which fall
to the cove below where tourists and locals alike crowd
the fifty yards of sand, but do not take to the water, green
and glassy as a cat's eye. They prefer the buttery heat,
women topless in the sunny custom here—natives an even
nut brown, Brits and Germans paper-white and sizzling pink,
all nonetheless beautifully acknowledged by the light—
nipples dark magenta as the ripest figs weighing a bough,
or fresh-red as raspberries over cream. I watch the lean
husbands stretch and flounce, canvassing left and right.
But where does it get you looking at the lustrous young
or those edging past middle age, sitting as I am in-between,
applying my sunblock in the shade? It only weighs the heart,
one more chalky stone about to tumble down these cliffs.
So I wade out alone, flip onto my back and float toward
the deeper blue from where I still see the women lounging
beside the rocks, shaking out their blond or auburn hair,
combing it down their breasts, sun-ripe and fragrant with
creams
or oils. I stare up after a sail-shaped cloud, and though sea water
fills my ears, I hear the uneasy music of the waves pulled
into shore where I have abandoned every thought of home.

NINA BOGIN

Landscape

I'll love the fallow and forgotten fields
because I have no choice, and woods
whose paths have been effaced.

I'll praise the hostile beauty
of the overgrown, the brambles,
nettles, thistles and hawthorn.

And I'll embrace the no man's
land, plastic bottles, broken glass,
crows feeding on refuse,

the fish in sewage pools, the fox
lurking near the dump, the pheasant
freed for the hunt.

Of all that is fragile
or misplaced, I'll be a scavenger
in the new wilderness.

JOHN LOUGHERY

The Telling Detail

THE AESTHETIC LIFE OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY has trained us (not unlike twentieth-century politics and commerce) to equate lasting achievement with size—colossal ambition, awesome talent, stunning bulk or breadth. Some part of that premise makes sense: the modern appreciation of Rubens, Tolstoy, Wagner, Proust, Picasso, and Pollock fits the pattern and leaves the faint-of-heart behind. The trouble is that in lesser hands, *bloat* is easily mistaken for accomplishment—to wit, most of the paintings of Julian Schnabel, a good chunk of *Angels in America*, and anything written by Norman Mailer after 1980. (More recently, *Infinite Jest* and *Mason & Dixon* have made a bid for Serious Attention by the pound, though whether these books are as dreary as Mailer's, this well-intentioned reviewer—having neither the time nor the curiosity to spare—can't say.) Two shows at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., however, left me brooding over this question of large effects vs. small, telling details. Both exhibitions, "Picasso: The Early Years" and "The Victorians," dealt with outsized ambitions, in the one case an individual and in the other an entire people and an era. They suggested that greatness just as often has to do with subtle tones and unspoken urgencies as it does with monumental innovations.

"Picasso: The Early Years" was a superb survey of the first fourteen years (1892–1906) of a remarkable career, and the frequency of shows devoted to this artist during the last decade—a fact commented upon by many critics—did nothing to lessen the profit and the pleasure it offered. First, its scope was considerable, from the early self-portraits of the 1890s to the portraits of the bohemian friends he knew from the tavern El Quatre Gats, from the first electric Parisian pictures of 1900 to the starker images of the Blue and Rose periods, from *The Family of Saltimbanques* (1905) to the gargantuan *Two Nudes* of 1906. Everything that will come later in full form was suggested here: a passion for the city and urban themes, a preoccupation with death, abundant art-historical allusions, irreverent wit (e.g., the artist as a Spanish nobleman *manqué* in the 1897 *Self-Portrait with a Wig*), ego, posturing, eroticism, a love of the theatrical and the antique. Yet, for all its variety of both theme and style, this show had an unavoidable, even poignant focus as a man born with restless, overbearing energy and ardor for the flesh met head-on a streak of melancholy, and decided that neither extreme of temperament would be allowed to give way to the other.

What most impressed and moved me in this selection of paintings,

though, was Picasso's gift for the small touches, his refusal (in contrast to his late period) to allow his larger aims to dwarf the more minute, evocative, idiosyncratic aspects of a given canvas. In the paintings of his first decade and a half of adult work, a bare foot is rendered with the same gravity as a facial expression. The patchy sand of an empty fairground says as much about loss and exhaustion as the look in the eyes of the artist's saltimbanques. The wrinkles in the face of *The Old Fisherman* (1895) are as finely calculated as the lesbian kiss, or the position and body language of each dancer, in *Le Moulin de la Galette* (1900). But this is an attentiveness that goes beyond the drawing, the composition, or even the specific choice of imagery. In the oil-on-cardboard *Absinthe Drinker*, *Portrait of Gustave Coquiot*, *Le Divan Japonais*, and *Dwarf Dancer* (all from 1901), for instance, we witness Picasso wondering whether color and brushstrokes themselves can become bawdy and decadent, libidinous to the point of being leering? The fiery red of the top of the absinthe drinker's dress is as menacing as the smear of bright lipstick on her lips and the dab of red at the tip of her nose, a potent contrast to the orange glow from a distant window and the luscious green in the glass her skeletal fingers are reaching toward. This is the land of Toulouse-Lautrec, but mined with a greater willingness to let go of the veneer of realism and a more intuitive grasp of brutal, sensual excess. "Picasso: The Early Years" did not have the feel of a prologue. It had a completeness and a rightness all its own, and asked its audience to see—truly *see*—individual pictures, not textbook masterpieces or examples of important "movements."

"The Victorians," on the other hand, was a more problematic exhibition. We were awash in purposeful detail, but were treated to fewer deft, economical effects and a lot less honest pictorial drama. The first galleries got the show off to what might be described as an historically accurate but aesthetically dismal start: the hokey animal paintings of Edwin Landseer, a frenzied Turner (about the drowning of African captives on a sinking slave-trader's ship), plenty of Pre-Raphaelite kitsch, a Winterhalter rendering of Victoria and Albert, and enough William Holman Hunt *gaucheries* to choke a horse. On the subject of horses, William Powell Frith's *Derby Day* (1856), an epic depiction of the annual Epsom Downs race, was by any account one of the dominant pictures of the first half of the exhibition, a detail of which adorns the covers of the Penguin paperbacks of *Little Dorrit* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. (At moments, the selection took on the quality of a survey of Penguin cover illustrations.) Frith's painting is a good example of Victorian England's fascination with chronicles of its motley, class-bound world. The problem is that—in sharp contrast to Dickens or Thackeray—elaborate visual treatments of social injustice tend to be records rather than analyses, encouraging the audience to focus on naturalistic technique instead of ideas, ambiguities, or flourishes of expression.

Nature comes in for a hard time of it, too, in this context. For a country that still had a fair amount of woodland left in the nineteenth

century, and relished its tradition of profound nature poetry, Britain was not well served in this regard by its painters. With Constable's passing, the best work in landscape was done and over. (What a different exhibition this would have been had Constable, who died the year of the Queen's ascension, been a bona fide Victorian.) It has always amazed me to read in the literature of Pre-Raphaelitism that fidelity to nature was taken to be one of the hallmarks of the art of John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the rest of the Brotherhood. They made their mark "by working everything," Ruskin wrote, "down to the most minute detail, from nature and from nature only." Yet this is exactly what *doesn't* seem to be the case in a painting like Millais' *Ophelia* (1851). The artist may have set his easel up by a stream in the countryside to analyze the current and the vegetation, but the result is a literary image, a finicky concoction that has nothing to do with the observable world. Moral import and High Seriousness, yes, but not a feeling for simple, natural beauty in the spirit of Corot and Millet. It was also hard to walk through these rooms and feel the Pre-Raphaelite influence as anything but baleful: John William Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* (1887) turns Tennyson into an exercise in camp. The textured, patterned blanket that is draped over the side of her boat is realistic and alluring. Everything else, from the lady's expression to the leaves, trees, grass, and even the water she glides over, is stagey and overdone.

Mercifully, there were some surprise pleasures in the second half of "The Victorians." John Frederick Lewis' *The Midday Meal, Cairo* (1875) suggested that some nineteenth-century British painters weren't obsessed with lurid color and knew how to create a representational scene with a degree of detail that doesn't suffocate the viewer. We also learned that humor wasn't entirely alien to John Bull's artists. William Quiller Orchardson's *Marriage of Convenience* (1883) is tartly comic; the elderly, mustachioed husband at one end of the dinner table looks like a dazed walrus, his kewpie-doll bride at the other is profoundly and hilariously bored. Even the enervated lighting says to the old man, "I told you so." Still, the potential for alienation in this survey was considerable. To late-twentieth-century eyes, there is something downright vile about turning the plight of the indigent into glib anecdotal material and oily sentiment, as in Samuel Luke Fildes's *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward* (1872)—see the cover of the Penguin edition of *Our Mutual Friend* for a detail—or Hubert Von Herkomer's *Eventide: Scene in a Westminster Union* (1872). I understand the futility of projecting modern social values onto the distant past, but we are not talking about the ancient Babylonians. These people were, so to speak, our grandparents' parents.

Another problem, relevant to the curators and their choices rather than to the artists, was that at no time did the exhibition really *sing*. I went expecting a room of Whistlers to knock me off my feet at the end, Aestheticism jauntily reclaiming art from the burghers. Instead, we were shown the portrait of Thomas Carlyle from Glasgow and two staple works from the National Gallery's own collection which are always on

display. I also expected Walter Sickert to figure prominently in the rooms devoted to the 1890s and early 1900s. We had to make do with a single robust balcony view of a vaudeville theater crowd. “The Victorians” concluded with Frederic Leighton’s 1894 *Flaming June*, which (as an evocation of grandiose ennui) is an oxymoronic dazzler, but the restrained Whistlers and the lone Sickert were a mistake. The spirit of Oscar Wilde and the lust-driven world of the dance hall, and all of Camden Town’s vital, tragic squalor, played a larger part in the consciousness of this fading empire than the Washington show allowed.

“Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life,” the summer show at the Museum of Modern Art, was an exhibition with a point to it (usually a good thing) which also verified its point in strictly visual terms (always a good thing). In other words, there was no need to read the catalogue: the paintings and objects that filled the third-floor galleries on West 53rd Street told the story themselves. That story had to do with still life as a genre of increasing importance in the last century, less as a minor but pleasant staple of the oil and watercolor camp and more as “an evolving system of representations” mirroring social change, ideas about how meaning is conveyed, and the place of sensuality in modern art. There were significant gaps in this project—major still-life achievements that didn’t fit the categories curator Margit Rowell had devised for the show and so were excluded (e.g., the floral and vegetable watercolors of Charles Demuth) or confined to a single weak example (e.g., the “pure shape” still lifes of Patrick Henry Bruce)—but that would seem to be the inevitable hazard of a thesis exhibition. Good history, Simon Schama once noted, is always a mess. A thesis exhibition, never.

Rowell’s first category dealt with “the world as perceptual field”—meaning, naturally, the structural and spatial investigations of Cézanne and Analytic Cubism, not only of Picasso and Braque, but of Gris and Léger (who were represented by some particularly fine paintings in this show). Beginning with Cézanne’s *Still Life with Ginger Jar and Eggplants* (1890) through Alexei von Jawlensky’s *Still Life with Colored Tablecloth* (1910) and Henri Matisse’s *Apples* (1916), the idea was driven home again and again: new means of expression were being sought, the utility of exact representation was being questioned, and hidebound conventions had to be subverted, yet the exuberant physicality of the enterprise was still in place, still honored. If the multifaceted *idea* of a piece of fruit or fabric was judged to be superior to a well-rendered *picture* of one, a compensation was offered in the lusciousness of ever-thicker, ever-gaudier brushstrokes—the crusts on the canvas themselves still serving the need to venerate the tactile and the edible. Perhaps best of all in this regard were the loans to MoMA from the Hermitage, including Picasso’s *Still Life with Death’s Head* (1908) and the unforgettable Matisse, *Still Life with Blue Tablecloth* (1908).

The Dadaist impulse to poke fun at time-honored practices, the Italian Metaphysical urge to idealize the quotidian, and the happy

embrace of the new consumer icons or “objects of desire”—Gerald Murphy’s razor blades, Léger’s typewriters—all played their part in inching art away from its base in domestic or backyard pleasures. Gone were the oranges and the clay pots, the bottle of wine and Madame’s apron—and the loving wish to hold them and stroke them into a second life with one’s paintbrush. In this light, the distance from Man Ray’s *Gift* of 1921 (an actual flatiron with projecting tacks) to Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup fifteen years later to Warhol’s Brillo boxes is not very great. Under a thin guise of humor (a decidedly belligerent humor, the best kind), which never masked its underlying pique with the world, still life was made to reflect its rapidly changing times: sassy (the “Real Fictions” of Dada), nostalgic (the “Modern Classicisms” of Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà), fretful and Freudian (“Languages of Surrealism”), or leveling and deadpan (the “Mechanisms of Consumer Culture” of Warhol, Ruscha, Lichtenstein). Yet Rowell reminded us that this process of stretching the definition of still life, and the value of still life as an essentially philosophical medium (no less so than landscape) is not new to the anxious thirties or to postwar America. James Ensor’s *Still Life with Cabbage and Masks* (1928), Chaim Soutine’s *The Carcass of Beef* (1924), and Max Beckmann’s *Still Life with Fallen Candles* (1929) are all statements of spiritual unease. The difference is that even with Ensor’s nightmare tableau or Soutine’s dripping meat, a sense of *sumptuousness* has not yet been withheld or denied. That would come later, in an era impatient with craft and in love with pastiche.

The last gallery of “Objects of Desire,” overlooking the sculpture garden, brought us up to the here-and-now. The thought of the “here-and-now” segment of any big exhibition usually has a blood-chilling effect, and that is not because there aren’t many talented artists working in every genre at the moment. The problem is that we are always treated to the usual half-dozen suspects, a selection that tends to be either too few in number to say much or simply a rehash of the last decade’s covers of *ArtNews* or *Artforum*. Few curators are willing to wander off the beaten path. “Objects of Desire” was more thorough and thoughtful in this area too, however, so much so that even Jeff Koons’s basketball floating in a water-filled aquarium was finally accorded a suitable context. (Koons is as moronic and successful as a contemporary artist could be and there is nothing so juvenile as a gallery full of his ceramic Michael Jacksons and other bits of eighties kitsch, but even a poseur is likely to have something to say about his times in the right setting.) Cindy Sherman’s photograph of the aftermath of a lurid feast is in the spirit of filmmaker Peter Greenaway’s *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*, but Domenico Gnoli’s gray-toned empty tabletop in his paint-and-sand canvas, *Without a Still Life* (1966), spoke for the quieter voice of the contemporary still-life artist. The same could be said for the pristine, even somber bowls, cups, and canisters arranged on Charles Ray’s *Tabletop* (1989) or the lone bowl clinging to the edge of a real-life table in Robert Thierren’s *No Title* (1990). Gnoli, Ray, and

Thierren attest to the difficulty of keeping alive the old genres when a world of meaningfully arranged objects, and the time and patience in which to contemplate them, is no longer a part of the modern experience. Yet there is a solution to that dilemma, Thierren implies—not unlike Mario Merz in his imposing construction, *Spiral Table* (1982)—and that is to take still life out of the realm of the small-scale and elevate it to the domain of public sculpture and grand statement. *Stacked Plates* (1994) piles high the ceramic dishes, each plate a few feet in circumference and the total over six feet tall, and dazzles by its curves, its sheen, and its nerve.

In a summer that offered plenty of interesting art experiences in New York—the fin-de-siècle prints of “Paris, 1890” at MoMA, hundreds of drawings from the Albertina at the Guggenheim, the ineffably weird portraits of Ivan Albright at the Met—“Objects of Desire” was especially thought-provoking. The twentieth-century visual dialogue with Cézanne and the Cubists is by no means at an end, even if the delights of oil on canvas don’t seem any longer the best means to express the heart of still life, its acknowledgement of how much power we invest in what we make, eat, and stare at each day of our short lives.

Some artists are lauded for their tireless innovations, and of course Picasso sets the standard in this area. The thought of a lifetime of the Blue and Rose periods or four decades of Cubist collages would be a source of great frustration to us now, knowing all that was to follow. Yet do many artists in fact feel that pressure to break away from what they view as a successful, durable path? A few summer gallery shows devoted to painters known for one style of work—Marc Tansey at Curt Marcus and Elizabeth Murray at Pace-Wildenstein, both in SoHo, and Odd Nerdrum at the Forum Gallery on Fifth Avenue—and one unexpected museum show were a reminder that many artists are less preoccupied with new themes and shifts of style than are we, the insatiable consumers of art.

In the case of Ivan Albright (1897–1983), the Chicago “magic realist” whose major paintings were on view at the Metropolitan from June to September, one throws up one’s hands at the prospect of this true eccentric ever letting go of his vein-bloated women and scabby flesh, his violet light and *vanitas* dresser tops, the underdrawing in charcoal and eerily suffocating compositions. Representing more a monomania than a trademark style, Albright’s universe is part *Friday the Thirteenth*, part *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and, accepted on its own limited and ghoulish terms, makes sense. Ignore the silliness of *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1943) or the leaden, mock-meaningful door and window paintings; spend time with the series of self-portraits, depicting the artist in various stages of decline, or just the everyday objects made creepy—a goblet, some flowers, a cosmetics kit—on a dusty table or bureau, and you are left with something arresting, or at least all of a piece, as it spurns the new America of youth, speed, ego, and optimism. *Into the World There Came a*

Soul Called Ida (1929) is no less iconic (or corny) than *American Gothic* or the muscle men of Thomas Hart Benton. Albright's art also implies that a repetition of method—or, more accurately, attitude and premise—works best when dealing with the human figure, just a face or a complete body. Our appetite for images of our kind, twisted into Grand Guignol or not, is as close to inexhaustible as anything gets.

Perhaps this is one reason I am beginning to find new exhibitions of work by Mark Tansey and Elizabeth Murray—staple pleasures of eighties gallery-going—to be less vital, less crucial. They do what they do so well. In Tansey's case, this involves a kind of hyper-realism, or visual hyper-text. Each large, meticulous, almost monochromatic painting contains an abundance of material to be discovered and deciphered. These are smart, sleek, cool, allusive, even pun-filled images. In Murray's case, the spirit is wackier, less cerebral and more freewheeling. Everyday objects (a lot of what appear to be shoes, shoelaces, and beds in the summer show at Pace-Wildenstein) are "blown up" cartoon-style on overlapping segments of canvas which then take on the aura of animated constructions rather than mere paintings. Murray is lively, even raucous in her color and her flamboyant sense of space. The domestic sphere that has characterized the art of women from Austen to Sue Miller has been juiced up this time around. Kids' shoes may have to be tied and beds made by women at home, but don't expect it to be an orderly process. The trouble is that both Tansey and Murray are beginning to feel like one-note artists. I am with them in spirit, but the exhibitions require so little time, promise so few surprises, make so few demands for repeat visits.

With Odd Nerdrum, who has also labored in the same vein for all the time he has exhibited in New York, I have less difficulty in that regard if only because each painting offers so much more to linger over. Now, reworking Rembrandt with a dash of sexual surrealism in the late twentieth century is a decidedly peculiar thing to do, however much one admires his browns and golds and perfect *chiaroscuro*, and I'm not at all sure what I make of this venture beyond an admiration for its truculence, its obstinacy—and its commitment to painting as a visceral, physical art form. There is a good deal of exposed flesh in Nerdrum's work, and we saw a fair number of penises and women's breasts in the Forum Gallery show (and in one painting, the pendulous breast and the penis are parts of the same individual). But his isn't a cozy sensuality. The body is a thing of treachery and decay in these somber, skillful pictures, more real than the stage-like backdrops they are set off against, though perhaps less permanent. The true gratification is in the fluency of the painter's brushstrokes and the subtlety of his detail and color—color which produces a glow that seduces before it unnerves. The result is a mood, less lurid than Albright's but, on occasion, more unpredictable than that of Tansey or Murray. And in the end that is all that we ask from most artists: rescue from the banality and the tedium of the already known.

RICHARD HORNBY

Feminist Theatre

LAST SEASON APPEARED TO BE THE YEAR OF THE WOMAN in New York theatre, with women playwrights, directors, and stars everywhere in evidence. Nevertheless, that old dead white European male, Henrik Ibsen, was still the best feminist author, while the best actress, as usual, was from England.

I used to read of the great actresses of the past, such as Helena Modjeska, Alla Nazimova, Eleanora Duse, or Minnie Maddern Fiske, who played Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*¹ to great acclaim, and I wondered what the fuss was all about. Although the play as a whole is a great one, far more subtle and ironic than is popularly supposed, the lead role has never seemed particularly difficult; in fact, I have never seen anyone fail in it. But now that I have seen Janet McTeer, I know why the role can be a triumph for a great actress. It is not just that she brought life to the character, which practically any decent performer can do, but that she found so much in it. There is actually a wide range of emotion in Nora, from the childlike exuberance in the opening scenes, to the terror when she knows her forgery will be found out, to her cold, rational demeanor in the final, famous discussion scene. On the afternoon I saw the play, many of the matinee audience came clumping in late not only for the first act but for the two succeeding ones as well, while McTeer herself seemed to have a cold, yet she had such spontaneity, pep, intensity, and variety that she soared above the problems. The actress has particularly expressive eyes, and an agile body that served her well not only in the tarantella scene but throughout. She could suggest a wealth of meaning with an arch of an eyebrow or a toss of her hips, and could also emit impulsive bursts of laughter that seemed totally unpremeditated, as if she had just heard something wickedly funny for the first time, though in fact it must have been about her five-hundredth performance of the role. She won the Olivier and London Critics' awards for it last season in London, and then, with the same production and mostly the same English cast, nabbed the Tony in New York, in her Broadway debut.

McTeer's range of emotion also included a tremendous sexuality,

¹ Or, as we Ibsenites prefer, *A Doll House*. Rolf Fjelde, the leading Ibsen translator, has pointed out that the title is not possessive in the original, that the house does not belong to Nora, and, most important, that Ibsen intended "an ironic modern contrast to the heroic ring of the house of Atrous or Cadmus." (Forward to *Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays* [New York, 1965], p. xxvi.)

which was matched by Owen Teale playing Torvald, her husband. The play has a false reputation for being stuffy, no doubt caused by weak translations or squeamish productions, but Ibsen is actually blunt about the Helmers' passion for each other. ("When I saw you turn and sway in the tarantella—my blood was pounding till I couldn't stand it—that's why I brought you down here so early.") It is a mistake to think of Nora as having been trapped in an unhappy marriage; the whole point of the play is that she and Torvald have been happy, and that Torvald genuinely loves her, though in a patronizing way. It is worth remembering that Nora forged the note not to advance herself in some way, but to save her darling husband's life, by financing a trip to sunny Italy, where he could recover far from the severe weather of Norway.

Just how feminist is Ibsen's *A Doll's House*? Ibsen specifically denied a feminist intent, though we should always recall Northrop Frye's comment, in another context, that Ibsen was an indifferent critic of his own plays. A plot that pivots on a woman leaving her husband (and children!) has feminist implications even today. Moreover, Nora would not have had to forge her dying father's signature on the note if the laws of the time had allowed women to borrow on their own. On the other hand, feminism itself is never mentioned, while related nineteenth-century issues like votes for women or free love never come up, even indirectly. The reason radical feminists today dislike Ibsen is not just because he was male, but because the social issues in his plays are not stridently proclaimed, but are instead subordinated to plot and character. Nora is not a nineteenth-century Everywoman, championing the cause of women's rights, but simply herself, a unique, vital, fascinating creation. We can, and should, generalize from her dilemmas, but the play does not function on the arid level of generalities, like a 1990s Performance Art piece ("Boo hoo, men are nasty to us women!"), but instead on a human level of particular individuals and their relationships.

Thus, Nora's leaving Torvald is not an example for all women, nor an attack on marriage in general. *This* marriage has been a sham, based on the subordination of one partner to another as a child or "doll." Nora does not walk out on a male chauvinist pig, but on a gentle, loving, ethical person. In fact, her disillusion with Torvald is not the result of suddenly seeing a brutal side to him, but of realizing that he is not the moral paragon he had seemed to be. She had believed that upright Torvald, on learning of her forgery, would immediately take the blame on himself, and was ready to commit suicide to keep him from doing so. Instead, he plots a coverup, deciding to give in to whatever the blackmailing loan shark, Krogstad, demands.

The great overall strength of the Broadway production (which also won a Tony for its director, Anthony Page), was in its recognition of the play's complexity. Thus, Teale played Torvald as a kindly, paternalistic fellow; the actor's Scottish accent added to the feeling of moral uprightness. The final scene of the play is popularly described in the

theatre history texts as the “discussion” scene, but here it was played more properly as a revelation scene. McTeer’s recognition of Torvald’s moral weakness, and, even more important, of her own moral strength, depicted with all the actress’s usual spontaneous vitality, became the true climax of this great play. “I’ve been wronged,” she cried with amazement, “first by Papa, then by you.” And when she announced, “I do not love you anymore,” she actually embraced him, an offbeat choice that was true to all the ambivalent emotions of the moment.

The rest of the performances were mostly exemplary, especially the Dr. Rank of John Carlisle, a tall, lean basso profundo who may have the best speaking voice in the world. My only quibble was with Peter Gowen, who seemed afraid to play the villainous side of Krogstad; not one of Ibsen’s original creations, the character is a melodramatic stereotype, but the ruthlessness needs to be fully played if the threat to Nora is to have its full effect.

I was not happy with Frank McGuinness’ loose translation. It has become common in the London theatre to commission new translations for productions of foreign classics, even when perfectly good ones already exist. Is this a make-work project for playwrights? McGuinness is a respected dramatist long associated with Dublin’s Abbey Theatre; his *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me* is known to New York audiences from its Broadway production. Nevertheless, he does not read Norwegian. Working from a literal translation, he missed a lot of the play’s nuances. For example, when Dr. Rank tells Nora that he is dying, he uses a financial metaphor, describing his physical condition as “bankrupt” (*bankerot*), which McGuinness limply rendered as “I’m going downhill.” Ibsen’s imagery can be as consistent as Shakespeare’s; here, Rank’s ironic usage reflects the continuing obsession with money that runs throughout the play. But this phenomenal production overcame all difficulties, even including the inadequate translation.

Lillian Hellman was not a great playwright, nor even a feminist one, but she was certainly a liberated woman, whose plays, if often formulaic, nevertheless contain intense confrontation scenes that are unsurpassed on the American stage. She said that she based her best play, *The Little Foxes*, on her experiences growing up, when she would spend half the year in New Orleans and half in New York; the contrast between Southern gentility and Northern avarice was only one of many conflicts in her divided family. Actually, the Hubbard and Giddens families in the play are all Southerners, while Regina Giddens, a native Alabaman, is one of the most rapacious characters in American literature. The plot of the play is overloaded with incident and obvious setups, but the climactic scene in which Regina kills off her sickly husband by withholding his medicine is sure-fire.

Set at the turn of the century, when the South was becoming industrialized, the play is about a big deal to build a cotton mill. Sickly Horace Giddens has the capital that would clinch the transaction, but, as a traditional Southerner, he opposes the changes the mill would

bring. The rest of the cast are mostly scoundrels, however, including his wife Regina, who in effect murders him to get the money. The only other positive characters, aside from the black servants, are Regina's sister-in-law Birdie, another traditionalist but an alcoholic weakling, and Regina's delicate teenage daughter Alexandra, Hellman's mouthpiece for decency.

For the Lincoln Center production, directed by Jack O'Brien on the large Vivian Beaumont stage, Stockard Channing led a largely indifferent cast. All actors have limitations, which are usually the opposite side of the coin from their strengths. Channing radiates wit, intelligence, and charm. Regina has these qualities in abundance, but at bottom she is also ruthless and ambitious, a modern-day Clytemnestra or Lady Macbeth. Channing played her like a fugitive from a Noël Coward play, cool, droll, and vivacious, but ultimately harmless. I never believed that she really wanted the money; it seemed all a game to her. The best actor in the cast was Kenneth Welsh as Horace, whose wheeze and gray pallor were totally convincing, as were his underlying strength and dignity.

John Lee Beatty designed a magnificent two-story setting for *The Little Foxes*, with a huge balcony across the back of the stage, with numerous rooms both behind and below it, all topped by a skylight. With its splendiferous chandeliers, sliding doors, carpets, and gilded mirrors, the set made me wonder why anyone living there would need or want to hustle money, but maybe that is just Regina's temperament. Beatty's staircase to the balcony was tucked away in an upstage corner, which made Horace's death scene on it (also underlit, by lighting designer Kenneth Posner) undramatic, but the main lack of drama, alas, came from the lead actress.

In her new play, *An American Daughter*, Wendy Wasserstein trots out her usual protagonist, a professional woman who is supposed to be a feminist exemplar, but who turns out instead to be passive, inarticulate, and dominated by men. The title character is a liberal physician who has been nominated Surgeon General of the United States. Her father is a conservative Republican senator who disagrees with her on many issues, most notably abortion. Given the differences between the two, as well as the ironic title of the play, you might expect that the plot would center on their antagonism, but actually they get on well. In fact the daughter, Lyssa Dent Hughes, rarely stands up for any kind of position; the flame of her liberalism flickers as dimly as that of Bill Clinton. When her nomination as Surgeon General is challenged because she once failed to report for jury duty (the overreaction to this trivial error is meant to satirize the media's obsession with politicians' moral lapses), she cries uncle and withdraws her name.

Whatever conflict there is in the play, then, occurs not between characters but within them. Secondary characters include a "post-feminist" feminist, a black Jewess ("You are a walking Crown Heights!"), a conservative gay man. The first of these comes on to Lyssa's husband (a professor who wrote a book called *Toward a Lesser Elite*, another

oxymoron); the second attempts suicide because she cannot conceive a child; the third betrays his old friend Lyssa by informing a TV newscaster about her moral blunder. Not only are these events terribly undermotivated, but they do not lead to anything. Lyssa reacts passively (even about the attempted seduction of her husband), grumbles, gives up. A heroine for the nineties!

Lyssa was played in the Lincoln Center Broadway production by Kate Nelligan, long one of my favorite actresses. A Canadian of modest means, she financed her actor training in England by going around her hometown asking for contributions! Back in the 1970s she starred in London and Stratford, England, at the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, developing into a great classical actress. Beautifully spoken (she used an English accent in those days, of course), she had charm, loveliness, vigor, usually playing strong characters like Rosalind in *As You Like It*. She moved to the United States in the 1980s, where her career has been disappointing. She has been in a number of films, even winning an Oscar nomination for a supporting role in the otherwise dreadful movie, *The Prince of Tides*, but her film performances lack the special radiance of her stage work. She is surprisingly unphotogenic; gorgeous on stage, her face is somehow too regular, too bland on screen. She has received four Tony nominations on Broadway, most notably for the lead in David Hare's *Plenty*, but she seems to have left the classics behind. The reason she gets nominations but not the awards themselves is that she rarely takes on roles that are worthy of her. *The Little Foxes* is no classic, but it is a standard American play of historical significance, and it occurred to me that she, not Stockard Channing, should have been playing Regina. Instead, she was playing the insipid Lyssa in standard Wasserstein schlock, supported by a strong cast that included the superb Hal Holbrook as her father, another performer of great, unrealized potential as a classical actor. How I would love to see them both in Shakespeare, or Chekhov, or Ibsen.

Like most other contemporary American playwrights, Paula Vogel has little interest in dramatic structure. Her latest effort, *How I Learned to Drive*, which played Off-Broadway in the spring, is a memory play that jumps backward and forward in time, mixing enactment with narrative. It takes on the fashionable topic of child molesting.

The story involves the relationship between a Southern girl nicknamed "Li'l Bit," and her uncle by marriage, a good ole boy named Peck. Much of the action takes place in his car, where driving becomes metaphor for sex and for life, and (sometimes a cigar is just a cigar) for driving, an important and enjoyable activity in itself. He wants her to drive like a man, confident, aggressive, capable. He is also madly in love with her, an emotion that is not reciprocated, although she likes him, especially since he is different from her other relatives and friends, who are depicted as a bunch of Southern geeks.

When Li'l Bit was eleven, Peck groped her in the car. After that, their relationship was not physical. When she turned eighteen, he asked her

to marry him; when she said no, he began drinking, lost his job and then his wife, and died seven years later. The initial molestation is not shown until the end of the play, however, so that their relationship seems harmless enough through most of the action. Nevertheless, in her final narrative she maintains that the event was a devastating experience: "That day was the last day I lived in my body; I retreated above my neck." If so, why did she continue to spend many hours alone with him, apparently enjoying his company? Ultimately, the disorganized plot of *How I Learned to Drive* yields a disorganized meaning. Child molestation may be a popular topic with feminist writers, but where Vogel is atypical is that she presents it without preaching or, indeed, without generalizing at all. A degree of openness is valuable in any social problem play, so that, as with Ibsen's *Doll's House*, the characters have independent life in a story that engages us. Nevertheless, when a playwright simply tosses out the details of her story at random, the result is so open as to be blank, empty.

Mary-Louise Parker, a successful movie actress, was adequate in the thankless role of Li'l Bit—yet another passive female protagonist! David Morse, whose main background is on television, oozed Southern charm as Uncle Peck, while the rest of the cast walked through their under-written roles. Mark Brokaw directed the Vineyard Theatre production, which had a low-budget look to it, with anemic settings by Narelle Sissons.

Elizabeth LeCompte, Artistic Director of the Wooster Group in New York, has long been the darling of the avant-garde, and of her lover, the movie star Willem Dafoe, who acts in some of her productions. Would that they had never met, because Dafoe is a terrific actor onstage, with an unusual, bony, expressive face (Hollywood loves him for villains) and a flexible, clear, resonant voice, all qualities that are wasted on the Wooster Group.

Last spring, the Group performed Eugene O'Neill's 1922 expressionist play, *The Hairy Ape*, in the Selwyn Theatre, one of the decrepit playhouses on Forty-second Street slated for refurbishment. The constructivist setting, by Jim Clayburgh, was a big metal erector set in the orchestra of the Selwyn; we sat in the balcony. Dafoe played the title role. I heard him beforehand on television, speaking of the "music" of O'Neill's language, which seemed odd, since most of us find language to be O'Neill's weakest point. In the event, it turned out that Dafoe meant what he said *literally*, as he intoned the lines over a microphone with no comprehension whatsoever. But at least you could hear him. Most of the other actors were inaudible, talking simultaneously or being covered by loud noises ("music," by John Lurie).

For all the emphasis on visual elements, the production was visually incoherent. Actors would carry on conversations from different parts of the stage, unable even to see one another. The metallic jumble of a set worked, sort of, for some of the play's locations—a prison, the monkey house at the zoo—but only the program would have told you that there

were scenes on board ship, in a union office, or on Fifth Avenue in New York. The famous procession of rich people on Fifth Avenue—in the original production, the first use of masks on Broadway in a serious play—was not depicted at all. How tired I am of muddled productions brainstormed by kinky directors! But I am in the minority. LeCompte won a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship in 1995, proving that she is the right gender and has the right aesthetic—originality at all costs—to please the establishment.

John Barrymore, who died in 1942, has returned to Broadway three times in the past decade, first in Paul Rudnick’s hilarious satire, *I Hate Hamlet*, which co-starred Nicol Williamson as Barrymore; then, in a one-person show conceived and performed by Williamson, apparently inspired by his experience in the Rudnick play; and now, most recently, in William Luce’s *Barrymore*, with the title role performed by Christopher Plummer. Perhaps this fascination with the great but troubled American actor, who was probably the best Hamlet of the twentieth century, is part of a wistful yearning for the days when Broadway stars could have grandeur as well as glamour. If so, it is all the more ironic that neither Williamson nor Plummer is an American.

Williamson’s version simply had Barrymore address the audience, describing his career and acting out some of his roles. The Luce play has a “what if” situation, and a second, unseen, character. In a desperate attempt to repair his career, Barrymore, shortly before his death, has rented out a hall to revive scenes from his performance, two decades earlier, as Richard III. We are watching a dress rehearsal in which he is using a prompter, whose services at first are all too necessary, but then become irrelevant, as Barrymore starts drinking and digressing, tossing back Manhattan cocktails (a nice period touch—does anybody drink them anymore?) while recalling his childhood, his marriages, his close friendship with playwright Edward Sheldon. The prompter becomes an important character, giving the actor’s desire to explain himself not only motivation but urgency. Barrymore needs an audience, even an audience of one; he berates and abuses the poor prompter, but goes nuts when the fellow starts to walk out, which is the story of Barrymore’s career, in miniature.

Of the two performers, Williamson gave you a better sense of Barrymore’s acting, while Plummer, despite the theatrical setting, focussed more on his personal life. Both Williamson and Plummer are great actors, so that Barrymore’s ghost seemed resurrected in both versions. I only wish we could really bring him back, though I doubt if he would want to come.

BERT CARDULLO

Secrets and Lies

I CAME TO THE TOPIC OF THIS CHRONICLE—the films *Secrets and Lies* and *Angels and Insects*—by way of the occupations of their leading male characters. One is a photographer, the other a naturalist, and I was immediately struck by what I saw as the similarity between two apparently dissimilar professions, hence between the two movies themselves. To wit, photography made every human being's face reproducible, not only the faces of those who could afford to engage a portrait painter, even as its logical extension, the cinema, placed the world at every individual's disposal, not just the disposal of the rich who could travel anywhere and see anything they wanted. In the same way as the photographer, a naturalist is committed to the objective study of all living organisms without passing value judgments on, or attributing moral, spiritual, or supernatural significance to, those animals and plants.

Naturalism in science, ethics, and philosophy led, of course, to naturalism in late-nineteenth-century European fiction and drama, where lower-class characters took center stage, heredity and environment became determinants of character, and human beings became animalistic objects for observation and control through artistic means comparable to those of the scientific method. Naturalism in the arts, together with—and often in direct combination with—its less fatalistic or more ameliorative middle-class relative called realism, has been with us ever since, as I trust the homely, familial subject of *Secrets and Lies* and the ugly, even repulsive, domestic matter of *Angels and Insects* will show. The latter picture was directed by the American Philip Haas, who adapted its screenplay, along with his wife, Belinda (who is also his editor), from A. S. Byatt's novella "Morpho Eugenia," which is one of two novellas in Byatt's collection titled *Angels and Insects* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1992).

The Haases are fairly faithful to Byatt's novella, with one significant exception, which I shall note later. The film *Angels and Insects* tells of an impoverished young entomologist of working-class background, William Adamson, who is taken into the country home of Sir Harald Alabaster, a wealthy, middle-aged clergyman and amateur scientist. William has lately returned to England (the year is 1859) from ten years in the Amazon country, where he lived among natives and risked his life to study the local butterflies. Shipwrecked on his homeward voyage, he lost all his belongings, including his many specimens—except, that is, for

two butterflies from the species classified as *Morpho Eugenia*. William is grateful to Sir Harald for rescuing him from penury, and returns the favor by agreeing to organize Alabaster's own collection of insect life, as well as to tutor the reverend's younger children in natural history. His and Lady Alabaster's older children are a grown son, Edgar, and two grown daughters, Rowena and Eugenia.

The correspondence between Eugenia's name and that of William Adamson's two lovely butterfly specimens is naturally no accident. Indeed, Eugenia and the other Alabaster women are exquisitely gowned (by the designer Paul Brown) in the riotous colors of the butterfly world, so that there can be no mistaking the film's (and the novella's) ironic parallels between the blond, patrician Alabasters and the low life of insects. Butterflies may be beautiful, but they are still insects, and here their flitting about is certainly meant to suggest the frivolous behavior of aristocratic women chiefly occupied with the pursuit of pleasure.

Insects other than butterflies populate the Haases' movie and Byatt's fiction, however, and they are of the unappealing kind. William breeds moths and is writing a book about red-ant colonies; moreover, during walks he takes with the Alabaster youngsters, he overturns rocks and dead branches to show them the maggots and worms underneath. A maid carries a bucket full of beetles up from the cellar of the Alabasters' great house, called Bredely Hall in a thinly disguised reference to the various kinds of breeding that take place there. And moths are visibly drawn to the pallidly beautiful silk of one of Eugenia's evening dresses.

The connection is made throughout, then, between the Alabasters and unclean insects—not, as one might guess from the meaning of "alabaster," between these aristocrats and pristine angels. And the symbolic pronouncement of this connection becomes clear: that beneath the seeming decorum, even primness, of the Victorian social order lurks a repressed sexuality that has the potential to create moral anarchy. The entomologist William Adamson nonetheless doesn't perceive the equation of Alabaster and insect until he is nearly crushed by its force, for he gets drawn early into his host family's web through a quiet attraction to the angelically beautiful Eugenia. Grimly aware of his poverty and low social standing, William falls deeply in love with the melancholy Eugenia despite himself. He is subsequently surprised, albeit delighted, to learn of her willingness to marry him, and the marriage goes forward, over Edgar's vehement objections, with the kindly approval of Sir Harald.

In spite of the fact that William and Eugenia's union results, over a three-year period, in the birth of two sets of female twins and one son, there remains an ominous uneasiness at the heart of their marriage. In the novella, this uneasiness is intimated by narration such as the following:

He was unhappy for many reasons. . . . [I]n the midst of the enclosed and complicated society of the country house, he was lonely . . . He

had no place inside the female society of kitchen, nursery, or pretty parlour. . . . His wife dozed and sewed and her attendants fed and groomed her. The other girls were away doing this and that . . . The young men were not often there, and when they were, were smoky and noisy. . . . If he had a place, it was in the spaces between the cushioned family softnesses and the closed-away servile hierarchies in the attics and cellars and back rooms.

The effect of Byatt's third-person narration here is to isolate William in his thoughts, and so to convey both his psychological and even physical isolation on the manor to which he was *not* born—and where his enforced separation from Eugenia during her pregnancies would only remove him further from the possibility of spiritual intimacy with her.

That separation is visually conveyed three times in the Haases' film by the emphatic closing of the door to Eugenia's private bedroom; and the cumulative effect of the successive images of this barring door is inauspiciously to suggest something more than mere coital abstinence, as Byatt's single verbal description of the ritual of exclusion does not by itself do. In addition, whenever Eugenia and her husband do have sex in this picture, the malady at the core of their marriage is expressed through visual metaphor rather than verbal portent. That is, the Haases make the direct point, through the sensational juxtaposition of images, that William Adamson's problem at Bredely Hall goes beyond his own emotional isolation or spiritual disjunction to the very nature of his connubial alliance with Eugenia Alabaster. We watch this couple's lovemaking four times in *Angels and Insects*, and in the first three of these instances—two of which result in the impregnation of Eugenia, ostensibly by William—the act of intercourse is followed almost at once by a shot of insects feeding, breeding, or bleeding. When we see him copulate with his wife for the fourth time, moreover—a copulation that is succeeded by the birth of Eugenia's second set of twins—William simultaneously recalls someone's hand in the act of drawing warrior ants.

The "someone" doing the sketches of ants is the dark-haired, drably dressed Matty Crompton, a poor but somewhat educated relation of the Alabasters who has charge of the family's younger children. She fashions herself a socialist, and is curious to study, with William, the behavior of ant colonies—of slave ants and their masters—for what it can teach humans about their own practices. Matty refers explicitly to the Civil War "being waged at present across the Atlantic, to secure not only the liberation of the unfortunate slaves," she says, "but the moral salvation of those whose leisure and enrichment are sustained by their cruel labors." She means by those masters not merely the plantation owner of the southern United States, but also the Alabasters themselves, whose family wealth comes from the Lancashire cotton trade, which itself depends on the American slave trade. So Matty has been observing Alabasters as well as ants, and she knows that, even as master red ants crossbreed with their

worker black-and-brown ants, Edgar has been ravishing the servant girl, Amy. She gets pregnant and is dismissed from Bredely Hall, but Matty Crompton recognizes that another young woman remains with whom Edgar has also been breeding.

He has been *inbreeding* with Eugenia, and remarkably appears to have sired all five of her children, each of which looks to the bemused William like “an Alabaster, a pale, clean-cut, nervous creature.” Matty herself has known about Edgar and Eugenia’s taboo relationship for some time. But it is a stable lad, not Matty, who calls William back from a fox hunt—ironically, the first “gentlemanly” pursuit in which we see him engaged—to look in on his wife, whom he finds in bed with her brother. William will not kill Edgar or harm Eugenia, however, nor even reveal the truth about their “secret” to Sir Harald. He will instead flee Bredely House for good and set out on another expedition to the Amazon, this time with Matty Crompton as his loving companion-cum-collaborator. The Alabasters must now live by—and with—themselves, with all that Edgar and Eugenia have wrought. Because they cannot survive otherwise, this family must also continue to live with its “worker ants,” the lowly servants who nevertheless know everything that goes on in the great house and sometimes anonymously choose to bare the truth.

As for the equating of the Alabasters and the British aristocracy in general with insects, all I can say is that Byatt’s novella does this far less melodramatically than the Haases’ movie. Nor does “Morpho Eugenia” seriously make the contrary parallel between angels and the Amazonian natives who befriended William Adamson, as Belinda Haas does through her editing of the film’s credit sequence. In the very first shots, we see and hear these natives singing, drumming, and dancing orgiastically around a fire, to be momentarily interrupted by the superimposition of the word “Angels” on the screen. “And” appears as the image dissolves to a different kind of dance, a measured ball at Bredely Hall featuring couples moving in telling circles, which is duly followed by the superimposition of the word “Insects.” Haas’s intercutting the title “Insects” here is, of course, the verbal equivalent of her visual counterpointing of William and Eugenia’s sexual intercourse—and, by implication, the latter’s incestuous defiling of their conjugal knot—with the ignoble life of insects. The opposite verbal effect is achieved not only through the superimposition of the title “Angels,” but also through William’s association in the screenplay of the Amazon country and its indigenous inhabitants with paradise as it is depicted in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In the novella, however, Byatt goes out of her way to associate the Amazonians, not with angels, but instead with the slave-making Amazonian ants, as this passage from William’s forthcoming book, *The Swarming City*, reveals: “[T]he Amazons . . . Their name is probably bestowed because like the classical Amazon warriors, . . . [these ants] have substituted belligerence for the delicate domestic virtues associated with the female sex.” Moreover, it is the Amazonian Indians, not the aristocratic

Anglicans, who resemble insects in that the men, like male butterflies, dress in brilliant colors, while the females of the species display plainer coverings or surfaces.

The point of the novella, then, is that *all* human life is somewhat insect-like, if only in the sense that people and insects alike are animals. While it is true that some of the Alabasters behave like “insects,” it is equally true that their purely patrician breeding is more a human than an animal or insect phenomenon. The real intention of Byatt’s title *Angels and Insects* is thus not simplistically to divide the world into angels and insects, into noble savagery and base civilization. Rather, that intention is to designate the change the world had undergone in the nineteenth century from an age of religion, when the line between good and evil was clearly drawn, theologically revealed, and aristocratically confirmed, to an age of science. This was the age of Charles Darwin and Auguste Comte, of Karl Marx and later Sigmund Freud, in which the line between good and evil became blurred if not beside the point in a brave new world devoted to methodically explaining the behavior of humans in particular, and animals in general, in terms of genetics and milieu, evolution and conditioning, biology and psychology in tandem with sociology, economics, and politics. No longer was man considered a special or divine order of creation, but instead just another creature subject to the same basic needs and impelled by the same basic drives as all other creatures.

The cinematography of *Angels and Insects* happens to convey the idea of a world under the measured sway of impartial modern science, as opposed to the absolutist rule of parochial Christian theology or lately of vilifying liberal-labor politics, better than the Haases’ scenario does. Bernard Zitzermann, who shot their first movie, *The Music of Chance* (1993), lights this film in such a way that sunlight doesn’t always bring with it a cheery brightness, nor does candlelight always warm the cockles of one’s heart. Whatever the light in a particular scene, it is subtly shaded, and the effect is to create a complex but whole picture of the world rather than an easy carving of it along partisan lines. The wholeness of this picture is necessarily enhanced by the cool, painterly detachment of Zitzermann’s camera, which eschews excessive cutting for the equipoise of the fully framed composition. That equipoise is sometimes disturbed, however, by the filmmakers’ predilection for high-angle shots of the aristocrats, such as the one of fat Lady Alabaster, asleep outside on the sprawling lawn after having gorged herself on strawberries and cream, the remnants of which are now swarming with ants. Shots like this obviously diminish the stature of the English upper class at the same time as they emphasize its increasing vulnerability, but they amount to a species of overkill in this picture.

The mostly appropriate music is by Alexander Balanescu, and it alternates between two contrasting themes, sometimes uniquely combining them into the same piece of accompaniment: a delicate, sprightly one, epitomizing by turns the play of innocence and the habit of

purblindness, and a moderately melancholic, never manifestly maudlin, melody that evokes the passing if not the decadence of a way of life. Symbolizing the new order or the new man, of course, is William Adamson, understatedly yet sensitively played by Mark Rylance. He manages to shade his character in such a way that this externally dour plebeian comes off at once as someone animated as much by submerged passion and intensity as by mannered protocol and inhibition. Adamson may be at the center of the drama of *Angels and Insects*, but he is flanked by three figures whose own drama sets his in relief and therefore requires acting of a particularly illuminating yet unself-conscious kind: the well-meaning but intellectually naïve Sir Harald (Jeremy Kemp), who also remains naïve about his children's incestuous relationship; the class-arrogant, sexually predatory Edgar (Douglas Henshall), who has not a mitigating ounce of kindness in his character; and the tremulously alluring female of the family, Eugenia (Patsy Kensit), who shows herself to be an amoral and finally amorphous being. As the somber Matty, William's complement rather than his foil, Kristin Scott-Thomas proves that she is Rylance's equal in the ability to suggest a depth of feeling and range of ambition beneath a tightly wound, narrowly focused surface.

Speaking of good acting, there is plenty of it on display in *Secrets and Lies*, the new film from the director-screenwriter Mike Leigh. Leigh is celebrated in English cinema for his method of collaborating with actors on character-drawing as well as script-making long before the camera begins to roll. And since 1971, in such movies as *Hard Labour* (1973), *Home Sweet Home* (1982), and *Naked* (1993), he has been trying seriocomically to investigate characters and stories from a particular corner of his world: the lower rungs of British family life, the more anguished elements of the post-World War II English working class. He has managed to conduct his cinematic investigation, moreover, without the political tendentiousness bordering on religious affirmation of Ken Loach (at his worst), or the passionate self-regard approaching masochistic exaltation of Terence Davies (at his best), these being the two countrymen of Leigh who are best known for treating the same central subject on film. Leigh's focus in rehearsal primarily on the life of character, on the artistic examination in detail of people's existences, is unusually germane to the subject of his latest work: the search of an adopted child for her biological mother. For the movie's questions are "Who am I?" and "How are these people related to me?"—which are exactly the questions an actor asks in the exploration of a character.

Secrets and Lies opens with the funeral of the adoptive mother of Hortense Cumberbatch, a twenty-seven-year-old single black Londoner, whose adoptive father is also deceased. Hortense is an optometrist, and therefore it's no accident that this opening scene is cross-cut with one featuring, not her biological mother, but instead her birth mother's brother, Maurice Purley. He is a photographer whom we watch fastidiously yet genially shooting a bride at home in her wedding gown—a "shoot" soon to be followed by a scene in which Hortense amiably

examines a little girl for glasses. Leigh thus immediately announces that his film will be concerned with seeing, with the ability to see (through frames) and the desire to be seen (in a frame), by means of the ocular as well as the camera lens. Furthermore, this director insistently reminds us of his naturalistic mission by five times throwing in a sequence of tableaux—otherwise unrelated to the plot—in which mainly everyday people pose for their portraits in front of Maurice's tripod. We see mothers and children, pets with their owners, various couples, a few exhibitionists, and, most important, the last photographic subject: a classy young woman with a beautiful yet badly scarred face by which we are simultaneously attracted and repelled. She has the longest session before the probing camera of Purley Photography, and her grotesque face becomes the visual conceit of *Secrets and Lies*: a corporal metaphor for the beautiful yet badly scarred soul of Maurice's sister, Cynthia Rose Purley.

She is Hortense Cumberbatch's forty-two-year-old white, unwed biological mother, who supports herself with a factory job assembling boxes. Cynthia gave away Hortense, conceived when she was only fifteen, without so much as looking at the baby, has kept the birth a secret between herself and her brother ever since, and has even forgotten that her early lover was a black man. She lives with her second (white) daughter, Roxanne, the product of a fling the youthful Cynthia had with an American. Although she has the intelligence to be a professional like Hortense, the bitter and angry Roxanne works as a street-sweeper in a sort of spiteful revenge on an environment that failed to nurture her. Roxanne's revenge naturally extends to her tipling mother, with whom she has a fuming relationship. At the start of the film, it's been two and a half years since Roxanne has seen her thirty-eight-year-old uncle, Maurice, and his wife, Monica; Cynthia herself has not seen her brother and his spouse for about a year, dating back to the day the prosperous yet childless couple moved into a large new home in one of North London's better neighborhoods. But the Purleys' estrangement is about to be cut short with the approach of Roxanne's twenty-first birthday, just as Hortense's long separation from her birth mother will end as a result of the sudden death, in her fifties, of the black woman who adopted her.

That death leaves the otherwise successful and self-possessed Hortense feeling lost, so in the summer of 1995, two months after her adoptive mother's funeral, she decides to find her biological mother. Hortense has known since she was seven years old of her adoption, but only as the result of a British law passed in 1975 is she now entitled to learn, through a social agency, the name and address of the woman who bore her. The agency advises her not to pursue the matter on her own, but Hortense disregards this caution and arranges to meet Cynthia, who, somewhat comically, is as startled to discover her daughter's race as the daughter is to discover her mother's. Their reunion is preceded by that of the warm-hearted Maurice with his equally warm-hearted sister at Cynthia's gloomy, South London row house, where both grew up, where

Cynthia more or less raised Maurice after the death of their mother in 1961, and where she continues to rent despite inheriting, upon the death of her father, the money with which to make a down payment on the place. She used that money instead to set Maurice up in his own photography business, and her gift is a contributing factor to the deep—and moving—bond between brother and sister.

Leigh cinematically renders this bond through a long take of the weeping Cynthia in the arms of the bearish yet loving Maurice. And he repeats such a held shot at the first meeting of Hortense and Cynthia in a big but otherwise empty tea shop at Holborn railway station—except that, in this instance, the take lasts a full seven minutes without a cut. The camera “merely” remains fixed on the two women seated side by side, gingerly getting to know each other. They meet again a week later for dinner as well as for the celebration of Hortense’s July 23rd birthday, then yet again the next week for a movie; and in this time Cynthia warms to Hortense to the point of inviting her as a “mystery guest” to Roxanne’s own twenty-first birthday party, which will soon be held at Maurice and Monica’s house. I hasten to add here that there is absolutely nothing maudlin about the budding relationship between this mother and her long-lost child, or about the accompanying, seemingly resultant détente between the bemused Roxanne (who still does not know of her half sister’s existence) and the mellowing Cynthia, even though the latter must do a lot of crying in the film. But her tears are earned, and they are varied depending on the situation or the cause. So much so that, for once in a movie, crying becomes a device for plumbing character, not for tugging at audience members’ heartstrings.

Secrets and Lies proceeds through the effect that Hortense has not only on Cynthia, but also on Cynthia’s whole family, gathered in the climactic scene for the party in honor of Roxanne’s birthday. I deliberately did not write “the black Hortense” and “the white Purleys” in the previous sentence because this picture is not about race in the way that it would be had it been made in America. Race is a factor in *Secrets and Lies*, yes, but not a hateful, divisive, deeply ingrained one. Class is more of a factor here, as it is in all English films, in that, ironically or not, the educated Miss Cumberbatch speaks the Queen’s English with exquisite diction, unlike her common blood relations. Oddly enough, on the surface her closest relative among the Purleys is the one to whom she is not related by blood, and who loathes the “vulgar” Cynthia whom Hortense is growing to love: Monica, who speaks well, has good manners, and likes nice things, yet who views the world through the myopic eyes of an interior decorator, not the expansive ones of an optometrist.

Among the revelations at the birthday-barbecue party, in addition to the chief one that Hortense is Cynthia’s biological daughter given up for adoption twenty-seven years before, is the truth about Monica and Maurice’s childlessness: she is unable to have children, not selfishly denying them to her husband (as Cynthia had believed), and nothing the desperate couple have done over the past fifteen years has been able

to change that. Ironically, they have not considered, or have chosen not to pursue, adoption, even though Maurice says that his wife's infertility has almost destroyed their relationship. Roxanne, for her part, practices the birth control that may have been unavailable to her mother, declares that she never wants to have any children, and initially is none too thrilled to learn—on the anniversary of her birthday—of the birth of a half sister six years before her; she says besides that she doesn't even plan on moving in with her long-suffering boyfriend, Paul, let alone on marrying him. Neither Hortense nor her birth mother has a man in her life, yet neither woman seems especially troubled by her "singleness."

What Cynthia and her two daughters have at the end is one another, even as Monica and Maurice have their marriage. These two say as much to each other in bed after the party in the film's penultimate scene, then we get the final scene the next day in Cynthia's modest garden, where Mother, Hortense, and Roxanne have gathered for talk and tea. The last shot is a long, overhead, slightly off-center take of the three of them sitting together in the sun, at the end of which Cynthia rhetorically asks, "This is the life, ain't it?" It may be, but the singularity of Leigh the director's unstable, aerial camera here causes us, if not to doubt Cynthia's certainty, then at least to question the tidiness of Leigh the writer's feel-good ending. And all the more so when we remember that Hortense's persistent questions to Cynthia about her biological father, during the two women's meeting at the train-station café as well as during their attendance at Roxanne's birthday party, go unanswered.

Fortunately, secrets have been uncovered and lies untold, but, unfortunately, the Purleys' happiness remains a fragile one, just as the comparative ease of their acceptance of Hortense may turn into the relative uneasiness. Maurice the peacemaking portrait photographer knows something about the common human habit of allowing orneriness and deception, fear and vanity, to destroy happiness—by which this movie means the closeness and connection between people. It is Maurice who, in his last scene, admits he is frightened that Monica doesn't love him anymore. Despite her protestation, it is his fear that sticks in the mind long after a screening of *Secrets and Lies*, just as it is the uneasy manner in which Leigh shoots the concluding scene more than the content itself that is etched in my memory. Mike Leigh seems finally not to trust happiness, and neither does his fictional alter ego, Maurice Purley.

What Mike Leigh does trust is his actors, and he shows that, for example, by not cutting during the long, uniting scene between Hortense and Cynthia in the subway-station café, as previously discussed. The actresses here—Marianne Jean-Baptiste as Hortense and Brenda Blethyn in the role of Cynthia—get to act *continuously* as a twosome, without dependence upon close-ups or on the piecing together of segments from different takes of the same scene. And these performers, like their colleagues Timothy Spall (Maurice), Phyllis Logan (Monica), and Claire Rushbrook (Roxanne), are able to reward their director's

trust because they've had the rehearsal time to prepare for scenes such as this one. Leigh is not averse to moving his camera rather than holding it steady on the characters, as he does in the tea shop; but he has to have a good reason for doing so, and he does during the opening funeral sequence, where the tracking camera creates a fluid, dynamic language of its own to compensate for the absence of dialogue among the static mourners. Nor is this director averse to cutting between actors in a scene, to the shot-reverse-shot technique of filming, but, again, he uses it when he should, to suggest conflict or tension between speakers, not as the standard method for shooting dialogue. Similarly, he sparingly uses Andrew Dickson's somber (not sentimental) score to adumbrate the mood of a scene, never permitting lush orchestration to substitute musical feeling for what his actors should be feeling, as many a conventional director would do.

As for the look of Leigh's color film, well, it looks pretty good in a subdued or soothing way, making much use of soft blues in the background of the mostly interior shots. One could argue that *Secrets and Lies* might just as easily have been photographed in graphic black and white, like the moving pictures of the British social realists from the late 1950s and early 1960s. But *Secrets and Lies* is not really as grim, say, as *Look Back in Anger* (1959) or *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), nor is it making any kind of sociopolitical statement that needs to be removed to the world of proletarian gray. What it does do, more or less in common with *Angels and Insects*, is centrally examine the life of an ordinary but affecting human being under a microscope, if you will, and microscopes have a way of both opening up dirty little pores and extenuating or alleviating the big bright colors of life's spectrum. In other words, "microscopic" cinema such as that found in these two films paradoxically enlarges our humanity at the same time as it reduces us all to our least common denominator.

ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

IT IS FITTING THAT THE NOTION OF THE MASTER CLASS should have produced a hit Broadway play, for the genre is at least as much theater as it is pedagogy. The audience is not a mere adjunct: the master's counsel and cajolery are addressed as much to the audience as to the aspiring artists, who themselves profit from the experience of appearing before and performing for the public.

Terrence McNally's take on Maria Callas in the play *Master Class* misrepresented both the diva and the genre, however you rate its dramatic effectiveness: having been present at the classes in question, I can attest that she was more patient and forthcoming than McNally allows. As for the medium, it is one of give and take between teacher, student, and onlooker; in McNally's hands the tight focus on Callas' offstage entanglements and imagined inner turmoil made the play uncomfortably claustrophobic.

The experience of the real thing is therefore a bracing corrective. In January the Juilliard School and the Marilyn Horne Foundation cooperated in a diverse program to advance the foundation's purpose: to bolster the sagging fortunes of the solo vocal recital. At its center on the first day were Horne herself and Christa Ludwig, probably the most celebrated and accomplished mezzo-sopranos on the international circuit for the past three or four decades, each acclaimed as a recitalist as well as an operatic performer. The aspiring singers, from the school's vocal department, each presented two songs for the veterans' scrutiny. On the second day the two took part in a panel discussion that included Martin Katz, Horne's accompanist-partner for many years, and Richard Harriman, director of the William Jewell College Fine Arts Program in Liberty, Missouri. Capping it all that evening was a concert in the Juilliard Theater: "The Song Continues . . . in English" was the fourth annual Horne Foundation presentation, offering four young fresh-voiced recipients of the foundation's largesse in a program devoted entirely to English-language settings or translations.

Both women are personable in differing ways, Ludwig elegantly Continental, direct yet with a hint of reserve, animated by an unshakable Teutonic reverence for high art; Horne down to earth, unblinkered, no-nonsense, peppering her advice with slang and wit, never overbearing or pompous. They share probably the one indispensable trait for making the master class format effective and tolerable for all: both possess a lively sense of humor.

It was apparent from the outset that these two mistresses of the art understood what they were up to: neither hesitated to address the crowd, which was palpably as much a part of the proceedings as they and their pupils were. "You know I only know what I know," Horne told the audience for her session, adding inclusively, "Now let's have some fun." By that she did not mean at the expense of the tyros: both women were scrupulously encouraging and empathetic, exuding a benign authority but tempering candor with civility, and drawing on a comradely awareness of their own foibles to help the young aspirants conquer their fears. Of a tricky Copland setting offered by the first singer in Horne's session, in which several verses succeed each other in irregular fashion, Horne said, "I've sung that song for forty years and I still worry about how many bars there are between the verses—I always count them." And to illustrate how in some instances legato phrasing must give way to articulation of the text, Ludwig recounted the remark of a young nephew who had heard her in a radio recital that included a Brahms song with the line, "*wie ein See so kühl*" ("as cool as a lake"). "Aunt Christa," he asked, "what is a *Seeso*?"

The accepted understanding of the nature of a master class is that it is a form of coaching: that is, the student comes to it with full command of technical resources but in need of artistic insight. Yet I have never attended a master class—and I have attended many—that did not frequently touch on matters of vocal technique. (Callas' technical advice was a valuable and memorable aspect of her classes.) The Ludwig and Horne sessions were not exceptions. Intonation, breathing, and support came up regularly, with Ludwig urging more head voice to prevent the tone from going flat, and Horne prodding a singer's diaphragm to remind her to float the tone on a column of air, and advising another to move the sound forward "in the mask" for greater clarity and projection.

Master classes, however, are principally about interpretation: the experienced artist passing on to the fledgling the wisdom garnered from a lifetime of performing. The best moments for participants and observers alike come when the veteran's urgings result in a clear gain for the novice when he or she adopts them. There were many such moments in the two sessions. Yet ultimately the value to the aspirants is open to question. How much can they take away from the few minutes they are the focus of instruction? How is sound learning to be distinguished from empty aping? And finally, no matter how brilliant the teacher, is there any substitute for abundant talent and intuitive musical understanding?

Still, the aptness of much the two veterans wanted to impart was palpable: often a phrase that had lacked vitality, when repeated after their intervention, sprang to life. Ludwig devoted her hours to Brahms and Mahler songs, and Horne gave hers to songs with English texts, and both returned often to the importance to an effective delivery of getting the words across. To a young soprano who essayed Mahler's *Liebst du um Schönheit*?, Ludwig chanted the key words—"Liebe, Schönheit, Jugend"—

and sharpened her sense of the vowel sounds: "With the German 'e,' make the tone a steeple!" Dropped final consonants were a frequent topic, both instructors pouncing on them at every opportunity, stressing their importance in making words understood.

Much of the pair's advice was about phrasing, that profusion of small touches that transform spots of ink on a page into music. When a young bass was doing one of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs*, Ludwig cautioned him not to chop up the phrase into "stepping stones" but to fuse the notes into a cohesive line. "Feel the pulse," she told another singer whose phrases tended to sag rhythmically. Often she used a swirling motion of her hand, like a turning wheel, as if to signal "keep moving" when she thought a phrase lacked a sense of destination. A soprano who offered Mahler's *Frühlingsmorgen* was advised that phrases written identically must be varied in performance lest monotony set in.

Another often sounded theme was that the singer's demeanor must match the song's mood. Ludwig pointed out to the bass singing Brahms's setting of Ecclesiastes that "you are not sad"—the words are rather those of a preacher. She advised the soprano referred to above to smile as she sings "*Steh' auf*" to her slug-a-bed swain—"As if you are going to give him dessert!" (She added, to the delight of the audience, "Elisabeth Schwarzkopf lived by these things!") And she wanted to draw a clear distinction between the style of the recital stage and the opera house—a theme she returned to in the following day's panel discussion.

Though she did not neglect technical and interpretive matters, Horne also provided what might be called survival hints. For a tenor who didn't know what to do with his hands, she demonstrated how to rest one arm on the piano—"use it as a crutch"—and recalled that Richard Tucker sang recitals with a rolled-up program in one hand. Glossing a soprano's choice of *The Lord's Prayer* as her demonstration piece—at first glance seeming out of place in the company of Barber, Copland, and Ives—Horne explained that every fledgling singer has to rely on weddings, funerals, and other church services for support in the early stages of a career, and that the Malotte warhorse is a staple for them. Offering a wealth of advice on how to project the song's lush lines, she revealed, as the singer approached the final lines, that she always closed the song with two "Amens"—"you see, I began my career by singing a lot in Hollywood." Wry humor was abundant: one student had chosen a song by Richard Hundley, who was in the audience, and Horne asked him to stand before the singer began, adding that "since I've never coached with a composer of a song in the audience, he may not want to stand when I'm finished." Now and then, as she guided an aspirant through a song, she would illustrate a point by singing, reminding all present of the distinctiveness of her timbre, the legendary clarity of her enunciation, and her sure command of style.

The following afternoon's panel discussion proved stingier in enlightenment. Moderated by the Washington critic Tim Page, it also included Katz and Harriman. Page tried to create an agenda at the outset by

citing “the changes taking place in the vocal recital—the repertory, the audiences, the venues,” but to little avail. As frequently happens with such discussions, it quickly strayed from the path he had indicated and ambled off into a series of anecdotes, random *aperçus*, jokes, and non sequiturs.

The tone was set early by Harriman’s melancholy recitation of some statistics about his concert series. Over the past nine years he has seen the number of season subscribers shrink from more than 700 to around 400. What started as largely a series of solo recitals, vocal and instrumental, now encompasses a variety of formats. He lamented the waning of interest in the small and intimate, seeing a trend for audiences to prefer the outsized and grandiose—the “Three Tenors” being perhaps the most egregious example. As for the balance sheet, “a presenter can get a dance troupe or a string quartet for what he pays for a solo recitalist.”

What to do to reverse what he called “the course of history”? Harriman cited frequent requests from prospective ticket buyers for young singers to include opera arias and show tunes on their programs, and though Ludwig in particular objected on grounds that the practice would be inimical to vocal health, the Americans for the most part reluctantly endorsed the idea. Katz cautioned, however, that “we still have to present something we are proud to call a recital: if you keep putting water in the gin bottle, it is no longer gin.”

One observation that won strong concurrence was that audiences seemed less and less prepared to accept programs in a tongue they do not understand. “Singers sing best in their own language,” Horne added, and Ludwig pointed out that one major difference between the United States and Europe was that French, German, and Italian singers had much more native repertoire to choose from. Katz summed up: “When an American singer signs a contract, he or she can insist that half of the program be in English.” “I cut my teeth on contemporary American repertoire,” Horne averred.

There were some potshots at easy targets: Horne lashed out at Washington philistines, asserting that every other civilized country has a minister of culture, and the virtual disappearance of early musical education in this country took its lumps, Horne noting that today some schools do not have a traditional piano but only electronic keyboards. Perhaps most tellingly, Katz put his finger on an underlying cultural deficiency: “What has happened to the capacity to concentrate in this country?”

But though Harriman refused to be consoled, the others radiated a sufficient degree of optimism to bring the afternoon to a cheerful close. And that evening, when four well schooled, talented young American singers—soprano Jane Jennings, baritone Marcus DeLoach, mezzo-soprano Pamela Pantos and countertenor David Daniels—presented a recital of song entirely in English, it was impossible not to feel that an artistic institution that could exude such vitality would be around for a long time to come.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Yeats's First Fifty Years

ON THE FINAL PAGE OF THIS SPLENDID BIOGRAPHY (the first of two volumes), Roy Foster makes a list of what William Butler Yeats would go on to produce or experience in his later life: "Perhaps his greatest poetry, political revolution, war, new loves, marriage, fatherhood, still more radical changes of creative direction, spectacular supernatural revelations, public controversy and acclaim beyond anything he had yet experienced."¹ Since in June of 1915, Yeats turned fifty, one might ask just how much his literary production would weigh had he ceased to write at the point at which this first volume concludes. There would be the poems, up through *Responsibilities* (1914); a number of plays and essays; the first volume of autobiography, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (1914); and some stories and other fiction, mainly Celtic in nature. On the basis of this work, along with his political and theatrical endeavors, Yeats's reputation was already immense ("He is the big man here in poetry, of course" wrote Frost in 1913), and yet, considering what was to come—not just "perhaps," as Mr. Foster hazards, but indisputably his greatest poetry; the magnificent *Trembling of the Veil* section of autobiography; *A Vision* and the late plays—one would advise the interested readers of 1914 to hang around, they hadn't seen nothing yet.

Denis Donoghue was originally slated to write the official biography, but soon withdrew over a disagreement with Yeats's heirs. Francis Stewart Leland Lyons worked on a biography of Yeats for ten years until he died in 1983; his archive of transcripts and notes was made available to Foster by Lyons's widow, and Foster dedicates the book to him, terming it "a work of joint collaboration." Describing himself wittily as an "interloping historian" (he is a historian at Oxford), Foster makes clear at the outset that he's not out to write a critical biography, in the sense of giving full discussion to Yeats's publications as they appear. Instead he provides a straightforward, exhaustive, chronological account of Yeats's activities, setting them—and doing so superbly—in the historical, political, and cultural scene. While taking nothing away from

¹ W. B. YEATS: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage 1865–1914, by Roy Foster. Oxford University Press. \$35.00. This handsome volume contains not only photographs but a number of fine pencil sketches by Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats. The front and back endpapers feature, in color, details from Yeats's brother, Jack B. Yeats's "Memory Harbour" and Robert Gregory's "Lake at Coole." The book is printed in England by the Bath Press.

his predecessors, especially the notable Richard Ellmann, Foster has wisely decided not to give, as Ellmann mainly did, a thematic account of Yeats's career. Foster praises Ellmann's "psychological penetration" but notes that "we do not, alas, live our lives in themes, but day by day; and WBY [his way of referring to Yeats throughout] is no exception." (Wouldn't most of us prefer to live our lives day by day rather than thematically?)

The influence of Yeats's father, John Butler Yeats, on WBY especially in his early years, was incalculable not to say tyrannical, and an incident from Yeats's autobiography that Foster doesn't mention may suggest how. The young Yeats came back from his first lesson at a dame school in Sligo and when his father asked him what he learned that day, the son said he had been taught to sing. "Sing then," ordered JBY and Willy proceeded with "Little drops of water, / Little grains of sand, / Make the mighty ocean, / And the pleasant land." Upon hearing which, JBY wrote to the schoolmistress that his son was never to be taught to sing again, and to pass along this directive to the other teachers. Clearly an impossible man, though a brilliant one; in 1903 he remarked in a letter "It is often an astonishment to me that I have not a son or daughter [there were four children] of some extraordinary distinction. Had my poor wife a little more intellect she would have been something very remarkable." (WBY was then a highly successful and admired poet and playwright, aetat. thirty-eight.) Perhaps the fact that JBY does not take up even more space than he does in Foster's account, may have to do with the danger that he might run away with the book.²

Yeats began to compose poetry when he was fifteen years old, and his family grew used to a "humming" sound as he worked away in his room. My sense of Yeats's ear is that he was pretty much tone-deaf to "serious" music and doesn't seem to have registered the great composers the way he did the great painters and poets. This doesn't mean of course that his early poems don't contain wonderful musical effects, from the simple Tom Moore-ish lilt of "Down by the Salley Gardens," to the ornate splendor of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," to the perfectly modulated cadences of "The Song of Wandering Aengus" ("The silver apples of the moon, / The golden apples of the sun"). Foster gives an attractive account of the impact of "Innisfree"—an early version of 1888—on the Yeats household as described by his sister Lily:

In Bedford Park one evening, Helen Acosta & Lolly painting & I there sewing—Willy bursting in having just written, or not even written down but just having brought forth 'Innisfree', he repeated it with all

² William M. Murphy, acknowledged by Mr. Foster, wrote an excellent 1978 biography of Yeats's father: *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)* and has more recently followed it with *Family Secrets: William Butler Yeats and His Relatives* (1995). One would love to see back in print the edition of JBY's letters to WBY that Joseph Hone edited in 1943, a book filled with marvelous things.

the fire of creation & his youth—he was I suppose about 24. I felt a thrill all through me and saw Sligo beauty, heard lake water lapping, when Helen broke in asking for a paint brush—she had not even pretended to listen. None of us knew what a great moment it was.

The poem's success would eventually irritate Yeats immensely, and Hugh Kingsmill recalls him "reciting [it] with an air of suppressed loathing" to a female audience in Switzerland in 1924 as they "beamed ardently at him, as though ready at a word to fall in behind him and surge towards the bee-loud glade." On another occasion, a note tells us, "Innisfree" was sung in the open air by 2,000 Boy Scouts—one would like to have been there for that stirring moment.

"Lanky, untidy, slightly myopic and painfully thin," even possibly tubercular as a child, by the time he was twenty Yeats had grown into what his friend Kathleen Tynan, who was herself plain, described as beautiful to look at, "with his dark face, its touch of vivid colouring, the night-black hair, the eager dark eyes." Debarred by his poor academic rank—he seems to have been at the bottom of his class in virtually everything—from matriculation at Trinity College, Dublin, he found his true university in theosophical orders like the Golden Dawn that provided, as a university did, "strictly defined grades, tests, and examinations." While not downplaying the appeal of occult studies to Yeats as avenues into folk myth and ritual, or as metaphors for the poems he was writing, Foster shrewdly suggests that these studies were also a way of gaining influence on and over Maud Gonne, whose immense appeal to Yeats was if anything enhanced by her unattainability as a lover. The discovery and editing of William Blake set Yeats in a tradition of Irish Protestant interest in the occult, a tradition, Foster points out, that included his contemporary George Russell (AE), and went back to include the novelists Le Fanu and Maturin and forward to Elizabeth Bowen, "all figures from the increasingly marginalized Irish Protestant middle class, from families with strong clerical connections, declining fortunes, and a tenuous hold on landed authority." This sort of placing of Yeats in relation to country, class, and religion, done with a grasp of economic circumstance, is what makes the biographer's treatment throughout so inclusive and solidly convincing—especially to a non-student of Irish history.

But it would take a very committed Yeatsian to follow with complete attention the intricate maneuverings WBY performed in the related but also competing worlds of occult research, political debate, and the "theater business, management of men" he engaged in at the Abbey Theatre in the first decade of this century. Strong women were pulling him in different directions: Maud Gonne wanted him to be more political, and to be satisfied with an "astral" rather than a physical connection between them. (They did briefly become lovers, Foster asserts, in 1908.) Lady Gregory wanted him to be more literary, if such a thing could be, and provided him impressively with the facilities of

Cooler Park—to the extent that Yeats became so accustomed to having the run of the place that friction developed between him and Lady Gregory's son Robert ("An Irish Airman . . ."). Yeats and Lady Gregory were an extremely effective team, especially by way of boosting each other's books, and late in his career, in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," Yeats would make the two of them, along with the dramatist John Millicent Synge, into a holy trinity:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
 All that we did, all that we said or sang
 Must come from contact with the soil, from that
 Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
 We three alone in modern times had brought
 Everything down to that sole test again,
 Dream of the noble and the beggarman.

It's sometimes a question of just how much of this heroic idealizing ("contact with the soil"—really?) one can take, and to his credit Foster casts an ironic eye upon many of Yeats's loftier pronouncements. In fact, and without too quickly looking to debunk, it is invigorating to contemplate Yeats's earnestness in a dramatic light that doesn't exclude the humorous touch. Undoubtedly the funniest moment in this biography is Max Beerbohm's account of Yeats and Aubrey Beardsley dealing with each other at a dinner at the New Lyric Club to launch the *Savoy* magazine. (The menu included Bisque d'écrivisses, Filet de sole au vin blanc, Noisettes de mouton tomates farcies, and a Bombe glacé for dessert.) Beerbohm writes that Yeats had been staying in Paris and was full of enthusiasm for Diabolism:

He had made a profound study of it: and he evidently guessed that Beardsley, whom he met now for the first time, was a confirmed worshipper in that line. So to Beardsley he talked, in deep vibrant tones across the table, of the lore and rites of Diabolism—'Dyahbolism' he called it, thereby making it sound the more fearful. I daresay that Beardsley, who always seemed to know by instinctive erudition all about everything, knew all about Dyahbolism. Anyhow, I could see that stony commonsense which always came upmost when anyone canvassed the fantastic in him, thought Dyahbolism rather silly. He was too polite not to go on saying at intervals, in his hard, quick voice, 'Oh really? How perfectly entrancing!' and 'Oh really? How perfectly sweet!' But had I been Yeats, I would have dropped the subject sooner than he did.

Beerbohm is in charge of the humorous superiority here, but on at least one occasion Yeats showed he could regard things occult with something other than reverence. In a letter to Kathleen Tynan of 1888 (not quoted by Foster) he confides to her that "A sad accident happened at

Madame Blavatsky's lately, I hear. A big materialist sat on the astral double of a poor young Indian. It was sitting on the sofa and he was too material to be able to see it. Certainly a sad accident!" What larks!

Yeats's *Poems* (1895), containing his verse and plays previous to *The Wind Among the Reeds*, would prove a key volume in the establishing of his reputation. Over the next three decades he revised the book fourteen times and it continued to provide him with a regular income, "twenty or thirty times as much money as any other book of mine—no twenty or thirty times as much as all my other books together." And much of this success happened while the "Autumn of the Body" phase was still upon him, when he thought poetry should be wavery and elusive and blurred, disdainful of hard outlines and richly soothing to the ear. After *The Wind Among the Reeds*, as Yeats plunged himself ever more deeply into drama and away from lyric, more than one of his critics felt he was obeying the wrong voice, and this reader, who has never gotten to first base with the plays, can't but agree with them. The change from dreamy verse melody to a strengthened, more wiry line can be observed in the opening lines of "In the Seven Woods," written in 1902:

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime-tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart.

These lines along with the more famous ones from "Adam's Curse," written about the same time, show that Yeats had mastered a verse movement expressive of what Frost would later call "the sound of sense"—much of that mastery due to his willingness to enjamb lines as he had not previously. But to my ears this development was independent of his playwriting.

Yeats's 1904 American tour, the first of three he made, was a great success: arranged by John Quinn, it took him mainly but not exclusively to colleges and universities. It also put paid to any notions of impracticality on the sensitive poet's part: Yeats was a model of efficiency, "always on time and made the entire Western trip alone and never missed a train," Quinn wrote home to Lady Gregory. During the course of that trip he became an accomplished and confident public speaker, developed a paunch (no doubt from all the beefsteaks served him), and displayed a long chinchilla fur coat against the Midwest winter. He was especially successful at women's colleges, to the extent that the wife of his brother, Jack, decided the "girls had developed crushes on him en masse" and she expected him to come home married. One guesses that he soft-pedalled the regressive attitudes toward opinionated women he would proudly display in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," and "A Prayer for My Daughter," saying only *in private*, on the American tour, that he preferred women who were unintellectual.

Foster has a subtle paragraph of analysis of Yeats's character as it developed itself after that first American tour:

The idea of 'masculinity' generated by his American triumph, his reading of Nietzsche, and the cataclysmic change in Gonne's circumstances [she had married John MacBride, the "drunken, vainglorious lout" of "Easter, 1916"] dictated a new view of himself. Throughout the crisis in the theatre he had determinedly stressed his own belief in autonomy, his 'dangerous' qualities, his 'intolerable tongue,' his 'delight in enemies': he pointedly told Gonne that he 'revelled in his unpopularity'. His sense of self-presentation had always been acutely developed, but since America it had taken a new and more aggressive form. . . . He remained secretly less certain than he claimed, admitting to Gregory that he often did not know why he acted decisively, and that he found it hard to recapitulate afterwards the circumstances which made him do so. But his old, uncertain self would become more and more deeply buried beneath the armour of the quarrelsome, self-proclaiming public man.

I don't know that it's necessary for a reader of the biography to have feelings about this new "masculine," "dangerous" Yeats, but he seems to me a not terribly attractive character, full of self-righteousness and prideful insisting on the virtues of his pride. Of course among his contemporaries Yeats had no monopoly on pride: think of Pound's fierce promotion of himself and others; or Frost's mythical self-creation ("To be perfectly frank with you I am one of the most notable craftsmen of my times. That will transpire presently"); or Eliot's conviction, expressed to his mother in 1919, that he is the most significant critic, if not poet, in England. But they seem to me, in different ways, to complicate their self-proclamations with astringent kinds of humor and irony—their display of self invites us to see through it, at least to some extent. Yeats's noble lyricism and noble rage, culminating in *Responsibilities*, strike me as more unyielding, more certain of their essential rightness. As ornate, embroidered, and mellifluous as was his Autumn of the Body phase, the reaction when it came seems equally extreme and self-vindicating: "Song, let them take it, / For there's more enterprise / In walking naked."

In fact, at roughly the same time as he was celebrating such heroic intransigence, he managed a few accommodations with the world: accepting a British Civil List pension; aligning himself—as Home Rule seemed incipient—with Protestant ascendancy values rather than the Catholic establishment; even becoming better friends with Bernard Shaw. One tends to remember the remark made after Yeats saw *Arms and the Man* about how in a dream Shaw appeared to him as a sewing machine that "smiled perpetually." In fact Yeats recognized Shaw's genius, and the Abbey Theatre produced *John Bull's Other Island* and *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*. For all the difference in their respective

brands of “word music,” the term Shaw liked to use about Shakespeare’s art, their creation of dramatic tones of meaning in prose and poetry was, to say the least, noteworthy.

In 1913 he wrote an explanation for his discouragement with what he saw, in Ireland, as “the public mind in decomposition.” (Some of this material would appear in the Cuala Press edition of *Responsibilities*.) He singled out three public events that had stirred his imagination profoundly: the death of Parnell; the dispute over Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World*; and the refusal of Hugh Lane’s bequest for a Dublin picture gallery. Yeats admitted that in each case there were arguments to be made on both sides; that the argument was not “ignoble” but that ignobility lay in the “minds that made use of it” for moralistic and philistine purposes. These events are of course featured in poems from *Responsibilities*—“To a Wealthy Man who promised a second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures,” “To a Shade,” “On those that hated ‘The Playboy of the Western World,’ ” “September 1913,” and “To a Friend whose work has come to Nothing”—that were hailed as a brilliant new departure in Yeats’s poetic career. His current biographer finds *Responsibilities* “a strikingly autobiographical collection . . . extraordinarily rich and dense in texture,” announcing “a savage energy as well as phenomenal recent creativity.” When the book appeared Yeats’s early biographer, Joseph Hone, said that the poet’s search for a public had produced a new political viewpoint and “an individual protesting voice.” So it surely must have seemed in 1914, with “early Yeats” still in readers’ ears.

Now, almost a century after *The Wind Among the Reeds* and with the twenty-five years of Yeats post-*Responsibilities* in view, that volume may look less like the beginning of something than an interim clearing of the decks, a paying back of insults (as to George Moore in the epilogue), a salute to honored dead poets (the Rhymers, Synge). It may be seen as a holding action, really, on the way to something new, “something” that we will see variously treated in “Ego Dominus Tuus” (the first “mask” poem), “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,” “The Fisherman,” “Easter, 1916,” “The Second Coming,” “A Prayer for My Daughter” and others, right up through the great heroic laments from the 1920s and beyond. We don’t need to downgrade middle Yeats, as Harold Bloom has done, by insisting that the early work is superior; we need only suggest that what I’ve referred to elsewhere as the “style of triumph”—by way of indicating Yeats’s vigorous castigation of knaves and fools—is only limited in comparison with what was to come. Consider, say, the difference between “September 1913,” a poem Foster makes very high claims for (“Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave”) and a stanza from the fourth section of “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” composed ten years later when Yeats had become husband and father:

Having inherited a vigorous mind
 From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams
 And leave a woman and a man behind
 As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems
 Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,
 Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,
 But the torn petals strew the garden plot;
 And there's but common greenness after that.

Not even an exceptional group of lines, yet they reveal a syntactical suppleness and human complication of feelings that simply isn't there in *Responsibilities*, geared as those poems were to a more unambiguous form of triumph. I'm saying no more than that in the period we may title Great Yeats—*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, *The Tower*, *the Winding Stair*—he really did become a great poet, one whom we look forward to reading about in Foster's concluding volume when the apprentice mage becomes the masterworker.

THOMAS M. DISCH

Poetry Roundup

A NEW VOLUME OF POEMS BY T.S. ELIOT? Well, yes and no. *Inventions of the March Hare*¹ contains about fifty poems copied into a notebook that Eliot sold in 1922 to his benefactor, John Quinn. (The sale realized \$140, not quite the asking price of five copies of the 1996 book, and a manuscript of *The Waste Land* was thrown in for free.) These poems, with copious annotations, constitute some 83 pages of *Inventions*; but there are, as well, appendices, with bawdry excised from the notebook and poems Eliot published, in variant form, in early collections between 1917 and 1920, some of them among his most famous (e.g., “Portrait of a Lady” and “Preludes”). Surely this adds up to a fair-sized slim volume of original work, and it can’t be dismissed as juvenilia or, merely, working drafts. Many of the poems would be cannibalized for choice lines and images in his best known work, but Eliot took that liberty with all Western culture. So, in that sense, yes.

However, the book’s real fascination is as an exercise in literary scholarship. Christopher Ricks’s glosses on every line’s, every word’s possible echo of its third cousins twice-removed in the work of other French and English poets may strike the skeptical reader at times as coincidental or far-fetched, but who can be sure? Even if the echoes are unconscious, they may have a bearing, if not on the meaning or merit of Eliot’s poem, then as demonstrations of the nature of the poetic act, and the specific virtue of a great poet’s unconscious as an echo chamber that somehow cross-references *all* the poetry he has assimilated. That, anyhow, is the theory of poetic creation implicit in Ricks’s scholarship.

One example: the second poem in the book, “First Caprice in North Cambridge,” in its entirety:

A street-piano, garrulous and frail;
The yellow evening flung against the panes
Of dirty windows: and the distant strains
Of children’s voices, ended in a wail.

Bottles and broken glass,

¹ INVENTIONS OF THE MARCH HARE: Poems 1909–1917, by T.S. Eliot. Ed. by Christopher Ricks. Harcourt Brace. \$30.00.

Trampled mud and grass;
 A heap of broken barrows;
 And a crowd of tattered sparrows
 Delve in the gutter with sordid patience.

Oh, these minor considerations!

These ten lines generate four pages of dense annotation, considering first the title's musical provenance, and other such titles in the work of Eliot, Arthur Symonds, W.D. Howells, Theodore de Banville, and Verlaine. Further, Ricks would have us "Compare two poems by John Gray, his sonnet *Poem* (1893) which has, in a sordid city scene, 'The garrulous sparrows,' 'child,' and 'grass'; and his *Sonnet: Translated from Paul Verlaine* (1890), which rhymes 'tremulous and frail' with 'wail' . . . and has 'at eve' and 'childlike' . . . There may also be affinities with the third stanza of Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush* (1902, written 1900) with its bird, 'frail,' 'evensong,' 'evening,' 'fling' and 'voice.'"

Many of the following notes to the poem are either interesting in themselves or probably relevant to the glossed poem, but at times they can seem like a universal Word-Search mechanism turned loose on all poetry ever written. *Inventions of the March Hare*, indeed! However, Ricks's method can yield results of indisputable critical relevance. In a recent issue of *TLS*, Ricks made hash of a deconstructive critic who proposed that the occurrence of the word "estaminet" in an Eliot poem should be read as an anagram of "anti-Semite," though missing (significantly?) one of its *i*'s. Ricks was able to cite the poem of the French poet that Eliot certainly had read and was surely alluding to. Eliot *was* an anti-Semite, but not, in this case, a crypto-anti-Semite. Score one for Christopher Ricks. Score, indeed, a few hundred. *Inventions* may be one of the great curiosities of scholarship. One would not want to see the same immense erudition perpetrated on every great poet's self-rejected notebook poems, but in its own way Ricks's *Inventions* is a thing of, if not beauty, intrinsic fascination, fractal geometries of the scholarly mind in full exfoliation and a benchmark feat of that mind's upstaging of mere poetry.

As to the mere poetry, Eliot showed good judgement in scrapping most of it, but readers with a prurient interest in the dirty underwear of the great will want to check the excised poems of Appendix A, where Eliot's "Colombo and Bolo verses" are exposed to view. They are execrable, and meant to be so. Dumb? As can be. Racist? Strenuously. Fun? Not for a moment. For bawdry, one good mooning from Jim Carey is more amusing than the best dirty joke Eliot could invent. Eliot wasn't there when God dispensed the gift of grossing us out.

Good families may all be alike, and each bad family unique, but the opposite is more often the case with poetry. Witness *Venus & Don Juan*,

the sixth volume of verse by Carol Frost.² Frost's poems, like those of so many other "poetical" souls down through the years, are genteel: wispy and whispery, decorous, pastel, and full of sadness. She spends much time in the garden, aching in sympathy with the weather, which tends to be misty. One poem of eleven lines concludes: "The sky neither questioned nor replied; its hard beauty lodged deep inside her." She dotes upon the inexpressible, the unremembered, and all that is blurred. Another eleven-line poem, "Failure," begins: "I have come to fear / mornings when the night before has failed to stir through with fresh air / the small rooms where incidents I scarcely remember occurred." The title poem rounds off the collection of thirty-eight poems by asking:

. . . But hadn't they rehearsed,
the pale moon slipping out of the sky each morning, doors shutting,
the bedclothes smoothed dry?
And what is left of their story but a fragment and the whispered
expression at midnight
of unheard ghosts who, with their own hearts in turmoil, have
not wanted even this much told?

Like her whispering, unheard ghosts, Frost is reluctant to reveal much about her shifting moods or even the day's weather. The 60 pages of the book could have been printed in 34 pages, if her publisher had not been so generous in partitioning the seven sections of the book with blank pages. Few poems exceed a page in length; most occupy less than half a page. Such emphatically scant measure would seem to be a boast that the most precious things come in small packages, that the poetess has compressed her soul into these few ounces of diamonds and lace. But there is no basis for such a boast in the language of the poems, which is as uniformly flat as that of the excerpts above and as lacking in prosodic discipline. Her line-breaks come whenever she approaches too near the right-hand margin, and spill over that margin if she wishes to complete a phrase. So the lines are quite long, but not, as with the work of other long-lined poets, like C.K. Williams or Albert Goldbarth, from any sense of over-brimming abundance or narrative momentum, but simply as a signature of her "style."

Frost is much given to asking rhetorical and/or unanswerable questions that masquerade as wisdom. Aside from the two posers concluding "Venus & Don Juan," her verses offer such gnomic questions as these: "—Narcissus at daybreak rinsing his forehead and watching the beautiful tears. / If *he* stayed an eternity on his knees, why couldn't she?" "What use the silence, semblance, and austere flying?" Or the opening lines

² VENUS & DON JUAN, by *Carol Frost*. TriQuarterly/Northwestern University Press. \$11.95p.

from "Pity," which I offer in its entirety, since in its brief compass it amounts almost to a Maoist self-criticism of her poetic method and the spirit from which it springs.

When the woman falls in the garden and hurts her hand, all the
 blows
 that have ever struck her, to which she had to yield, seem to return,
 so morose the look in her eyes. But haven't they always been there,
 saved up and partly concealed, so she could look them over one by
 one,
 eating and sleeping with them? The blows
 live in her honeycombed mind and newly with each passing day
 establish what she will give away and what she will share.
 As she holds her wrist, she waits for the tumult in her body to
 dwindle—
 a blue welt is forming under a fingernail—and she breathes the
 summer air,
 soft as skin on warm tomatoes. It is hard to believe in what goes on
 without one.
 And the heart learns a pity for itself, easy, coarse, common as the
 grave.

Does this mean no one should attempt poetry if he or she is much given to depression? Not at all. Many depressive types from Coleridge to Philip Levine have written excellent poetry, and a hefty anthology could be compiled of their odes to melancholy. Frost's rooted flaw is her too-exclusive interest in Carol Frost allied with a monumental lack of curiosity about any part of the world outside her immediate purview. There are *he's* and *she's* and *you's* activating the verbs throughout the book, but all of them, except the *he's*, seem to be a form of *herself*, and *he* functions chiefly as the object of her muted reproaches, as when, in the line cited above, she wonders why she can't have equal opportunity with Narcissus in regard to the contemplation of "beautiful tears."

If *Venus & Don Juan* is a half-full cup of tepid tea, Amy Gerstler's *Crown of Weeds*³ is a gallon jug of California's finest Hearty Burgundy. Gerstler is a poet of abundance, keenly observing a world teeming with people of all ages, temperaments, and social classes, and setting down her observations in concise, zesty language, after the fashion of May Swenson, with a similar flair for the surprising but apt metaphor. While a genteel poet offers metaphors already sanctioned by long use, comparing one known loveliness to another and *telling* us they're beautiful, Gerstler's metaphors zip by like freeway traffic, and we realize that the energies pervading her busy world are the essence of beauty. A newborn looks like "a furious, skinned / kitten. You looked cooked. / Roasted, to

³ CROWN OF WEEDS, by Amy Gerstler. Penguin. \$14.95p.

be precise." His hair "stands straight / up, like a smoky flame, / a rooster's comb, a hand / raised for permission to speak." His expression is "as wonderfully / sour as onions sauteed in aged / yak butter." Who does not recognize that baby, and who possessing an adventurous appetite does not want a taste of Gerstler's onions?

This is not to say she is, primarily, an observer. Her poems express the whole gamut of what a *femme moyenne sensuelle* might feel. In "Recipe for Trouble," one of her drolly surreal instructional poems (a New York School tradition she excels in), an angry Gerstler offers this advice:

... Bruise some shallots.
 Bring the shallots
 and cucumbers into the kitchen
 and put them down the garbage
 disposal. Bone
 yet another frying hen
 and throw her out the window
 into your creepy neighbor's
 garden ...
 ... Take the handkerchief
 of a pastor who's recently
 delivered a beautiful
 tear-jerking eulogy
 and boil till gelatinous.
 Skim off the grease.
 Serve with looter's spittle,
 croutons, the eyelashes of a man
 who hallucinates nonstop,
 slices of peeled lemon,
 and a glass of port wine.

Each of the poems Gerstler serves up is an entree sufficient for an evening's cogitation. The title poem, for instance, is cast as a soliloquy by the elderly John Ruskin, at once a cruel dissection of his dysfunctional psyche and a warm appreciation of his genius, an essay reducing her subject to his quiddity. But why this poem, rather than two dozen others of equal merit, was chosen for the honor of lending its title to the book, I can't comprehend. Gerstler might more aptly have taken her title from the poem "A Measured Joy," which is an exuberant catalogue of metaphors for "love in its lunatic ceaselessness."

Charles Martin's *What the Darkness Proposes*⁴ offers many of the

⁴ WHAT THE DARKNESS PROPOSES, by *Charles Martin*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. \$16.95.

pleasures that are to be had in Gerstler's poetry, with the additional pleasure that comes from Martin's gift as a craftsman of formal verse. Those who lack that gift are prone to discount that pleasure, as though, unless the poet always speaks of serious matters in a solemn tone of voice, his wit will tell against him. A poem that means to amuse, that *plays* with its words, that dances, will be dismissed by those who suppose the gods are similarly severe and graceless.

The argument is over a century old, and still it nags at those poets and readers who would preserve a continuity with the (formal) poetry of the past. In the long meditation, "A Walk in the Hills above the Artists' House," which fills half of Martin's book, the poet himself is lured into rehearsing that argument in terms I can't improve upon. Here, from the hundred stanzas that make up the poem, are lines, pertinent to that theme, ripped unkindly from their smooth-flowing context:

Another theme, so often used
That I was anxious to avoid it,
Afraid that I would be accused
Of terminal belatedness;
Ecclesiastes once employed it,
Borrowed, no doubt, from *Gilgamesh*:
Nothing is new under the sun,
And all is vanity we've done.

Thoughts such as these often occur
As shadows pull us to the brink
Of night and vision starts to blur;
What's left for anyone to do,
And can't I freshen up that drink?
Of course you can, I wish I knew—
But is it possible that we,
Who think ourselves *le dernier cri*,

And who collectively inherit
The forms all former ages shaped,
Can do no better than to parrot—
Or, as we say, "appropriate"—
Grand themes in styles once apt, now aped,
Once suitable, now second rate?

The context in which these doubts arise (and are resolved) is an account of Martin's residence at the Djerassi Foundation's artists' colony on the Pacific coast, where he was at work on the poem we are reading, with the evening walk of the title foregrounded. The milieu is sketched in both its naturalistic and social detail, but these sketches become the jumping-off points for digressions, after the fashion of Byron or Pushkin,

all relating to the process of the poem's (or poetry's) creation and readerly consideration. Another poem, then, about poetry? Yes, but also about life and death and nature and other eternal verities.

Along the way "A Walk in the Hills" also treats of an early patron of the arts and his Pompeian villa, of ideal breakfasts and the weeds of California, of sex and airplanes. Spacious and colloquial as the landscapes and interiors it inhabits, "A Walk" makes a persuasive case for leading a civilized, sensuous, and temperate life, such as the poet can be witnessed living himself.

Mark Jarman's *Questions for Ecclesiastes*⁵ offers a very different reading of that text. The title poem, written in prose with the volume turned all the way up, rages against more than the dying of the light. It begins:

What if on a foggy night in a beachtown, a night when
the Pacific leans close like the face of a wet cliff, a
preacher were called to the house of a suicide, a
house of strangers, where a child had discharged a
rifle through the roof of her mouth and the top of
her skull?

What if he went to the house where the parents, stunned
into plastic statues, sat behind their coffee table,
and what if he assured them that the sun would rise
and go down, the wind blow south, then turn north,
whirling constantly, rivers—even the concrete flume
of the great Los Angeles—run into the seas, and four-
teen year old girls would manage to spirit themselves
out of life, nothing was new under the sun?

The poem continues for three more pages of cruel juxtapositions between the bleak reality the parents face and the ever more ineffectual solaces the preacher can offer. The preacher is no fiction but Jarman's own father, whose bare-bones ministry to poor white Protestants figures in other poems; Jarman Sr. lends the whole book an unusually effective ghostly presence, as in a staging of *Hamlet*, with the elder Hamlet always on stage. For through his father Jarman experienced at an early age the great question of, "If God is good, then why are things this way?" Or in Jarman's words, near the end of the poem: "They all seem worse than heartless, don't they, these stark and irrelevant platitudes, albeit stoical and final, oracular, stony, and comfortless? But they were at the center of that night, even if they were unspoken."

In other poems, Jarman's rage is more muted and his craft more evident—especially in his sequence of twenty "Unholy Sonnets"—but whether he rants or he rhymes, his theme is single-mindedly the

⁵ QUESTIONS FOR ECCLESIASTES, by Mark Jarman. Story Line Press. \$22.00; \$10.95.

problem of justice and the silence of God in the face of all the defiances that poetry and human nature can hurl against Him. In the first poem of the sequence (an elegant Petrarchan sonnet; each subsequent sonnet has its own formal singularity), the sestet, following on an octave that is a sardonic litany of His Holy Names, declares

I can say almost anything about you,
O Big Idea, and with each epithet,
Create new reasons to believe or doubt you,
Black Hole, White Hole, Presidential Jet.
But what's the anything I must leave out? You
Solve nothing but the problems that I set.

That in a nutshell (and the book constitutes a large bowlful of such nutshells) is Jarman's difficulty as a poet-theologian. Unlike John Donne, author of the *Holy Sonnets*, Jarman's religious faith is far from triumphant, and death still has its sting. Perhaps that was so even for Jarman Sr., but the younger Jarman has read Bonhoeffer, and knows that post-Enlightenment Christianity has little to offer in the way of the consolations of philosophy *except* the wisdom of Ecclesiastes—i.e., a can of worms.

In this Jarman is impaled on the horns of the dilemma that pierce or threaten all religious poets of the present day, and he has no original solution to the contest between a desire to believe and disabling doubt. The great merit of his poems is their passion and (what is so seldom a poetic virtue) their sincerity. One often feels with an overtly religious poet (Hopkins, Eliot) that one is not being given the whole story, that some crucial doubts (heaven, hell, any redemption beyond posterity's second thoughts) are not being laid on the table, that we are in the incensed realm of Wishful Thinking. But God, for all the doubts and reproaches He inspires in Jarman, manages to exist in these poems, in much the way that Jarman Sr. does, a ghostly, forceful presence.

That said, I would maintain that Jarman's best poems are in the reigning mode of anecdotal allegory, in which a significant moment from the poet's own life is evoked and emblemized by the miracle of art. By his own arrangement of the poems in the book, Jarman would seem to concur, for the most stunning of them, "Ground Swell" is given pride of place as a kind of preface. In this poem he tells of his experience, at age fifteen, surfing on the California coast. He renders the Pacific as probably only a surfer can, and, securely mounted on this board, he tells how

An older boy who had just graduated
And grown a great blond mustache, like a walrus,
Skimmed past me like a smooth machine on the water,
And said my name. I was so much younger,

To be identified by one like him—
The easy deference of a kind of god
Who also went to church where I did—made me
Reconsider my worth. . . .

Later, in the brief span of that poem, Jarman tells how his father preached that god's funeral sermon when he returned from Vietnam. There's not a drop of bathos. It is a poem, really, about the Pacific Ocean, and a fine one.

In summary, there is no summary. One book that is both a curiosity of literature and a marvel of scholarship, another that is an instructive example of Poesy gone wrong, and three A+ level candidates for glory, each so peculiar in the excellence and pleasure it offers as to baffle anyone in the business of awarding laurels.

SUSAN BALÉE

Mammarian Musings

MARILYN YALOM'S SEMINAL—OOPS, *LACTATIONAL*—STUDY, *A History of the Breast*,¹ does indeed deliver on the promise its author makes in the first sentence of her book: "I intend to make you think about women's breasts as you never have before." I've certainly thought about women's breasts *more* than I ever have before! Indeed, after three-hundred-plus pages of mammarian musings, I doubt if I shall ever view my own pair the same way again.

Thousands of years of historical references to mammary glands. Whew. Yalom dug into those milky mountains and they proved flowing fonts of information. Still, there were several places where this book sagged, perhaps because what would have been a good fifty-page article was surgically augmented to a whopping three-hundred-thirty-one-page tome. If I were the editor, I'd have said, "Cut, cut, cut! Less is more." But, then, this is the fashion nowadays in scholarship: we know more and more about less and less. The unfortunate outcome of specialization in a book like this is that cutting the breast off from the rest of the female body gives us an erroneous picture of its place in history and culture. We don't see it as it really was—connected to everything else.

On the other hand, what we learn from history is that we do not learn from history: we learn about our own historical moment and we learn about the historian. In this case, I learned on page one that Marilyn Yalom views breasts from a Marxist-feminist perspective, a popular viewpoint for scholars of the last thirty years. She tells us that we need to think about a basic question as we read her book: Who *owns* the breast?

Does it belong to the suckling child, whose life is dependent on a mother's milk or an effective substitute? Does it belong to the man or woman who fondles it? Does it belong to the artist who represents the female form, or the fashion arbiter who chooses small or large breasts . . . ? Does it belong to the clothing industry . . . ?

Does it belong to the priest, politician, lawyer, medical doctor, pornographer, or (a radical thought) the woman herself? "These questions suggest some of the various efforts men and institutions have made throughout history to appropriate women's breasts." Men and institutions *appropriate* women's breasts. Sigh. I groaned as I read that and then

¹ A HISTORY OF THE BREAST, by Marilyn Yalom. Alfred A. Knopf. \$29.95.

I mentally answered Yalom's question. My breasts are *my own*—thank you very much—though I am willing to loan them out occasionally to a deft handler!

Although I dislike the emphasis on ownership (the “commodification of the breast” to quote the Marxist lexicon), I did learn a lot from this book. Once I sifted out the facts from the ideology, I enjoyed the facts themselves. People's attitudes about breasts have shifted with each era. Or, rather, they've swung. Basically, the alternations have been on the Melanie Klein model: good breast, bad breast, good breast, bad breast, alternating ad infinitum. The Biblical breast was a sacred, milk-producing vessel: a distinctly Good Breast. This sacred breast, best exemplified by all those nursing madonnas so woodenly depicted in the art of the Middle Ages, prevailed up until the Renaissance. At that point, the breast as an Erotic Object began to eclipse its maternal, and therefore sacred, meanings. Erotic Breast: Bad Breast. Why “bad,” you ask? Ah, poor, ignorant late-twentieth-century reader! Bad because erotic breasts turn men on and can therefore lead them to their doom. Erotic breasts are found on prostitutes and in pornography. Erotic breasts cause trouble, even as they titillate the (mainly male) viewer. Erotic breasts get punished by aroused, angry men.

Blazon poetry, which flourished in mid-sixteenth-century Europe, celebrated every part of the female body from eyebrows to toenails. “Blazon” means both a heraldic shield (French) and “to blaze, or trumpet” (English), and blazon poetry represented a focused variant of Renaissance love poetry. Anti-blazon poetry, which also appeared in this period, constituted the mutilating undertext of Renaissance love poetry. A sample from Clément Marot (who also wrote an adoring ode to breasts, “Le Beau Tétin”) should suffice:

Breast with a big, ugly black tip
Like that of a funnel,

.....

Breast that's good for nursing
Lucifer's children in Hell.

.....

Go away, big ugly stinking breast,
When you sweat, you could provide
Sufficient musk and perfume
To kill off a hundred thousand.

Not a happy suckler, old Marot. But the anti-blazon was just what it sounds like: the subversive dark side of a literary culture that adored breasts far more than it despised them.

Renaissance English, for example, contained more regularly-used synonyms for breasts than did any other period of our linguistic history. Poets had a variety of semantic fields from which to pluck their rounded nouns, to wit: bosom, bed, fountain, paps, milk-paps, teats, dugs (not derogatory in those days), apples, cherrylets, strawberries, buds, hemispheres, worlds, globes, orbs, hills, mountains, and any other spherical object the breast-besotted writer could come up with to honor his lady's chest. Robert Greene ("Menaphon," 1589) depicted his ideal woman whose "paps are like fair apples in the prime, / As round as orient pearls, as soft as down." Edmund Spenser (Sonnet 64) loved a lady with a "goodly bosom like a Strawberry bed; . . . / Her breasts like lilies, ere their leaves be shed; / Her nipples like young-blossomed Jessamines." His "Epithalamion," another ode to the female body, moves out of the garden and into the kitchen; here, "Her breasts like to a bowl of cream uncruddled, / Her paps like lilies budded." Meanwhile, in art, a hand on the breast (usually a male hand) became a common Renaissance motif.

In less metaphysical realms than art and poetry, the battle over breast-feeding babies tangibly affected middle- and upper-class mothers from the 1500s to the late 1700s. The Protestant church advocated that women nurse their own children, but wealthy women avoided it, handing their babies over to wet nurses whenever possible. Those budded lilies tend to lose their petals when a baby tugs awhile on them, and the "ideal" (read, "unused") breast desired by poets and artists conflicted with the maternal breast desired by babies. Meanwhile, tight fitting bodices were further constricting women's bodies and deforming their breasts in the process. A host of critics attacked both the fashion industry that encouraged women to cinch in their waists, draw back their shoulder blades and thrust out their chests with a corset or bodice, and the (anti)maternal practice of sending babies out to wet nurses.

On the second point they won more ground than on the first. Women continued to torture their bodies with fashionable clothes, but they ceased permitting their newborns to be suckled by other women. A simple fact influenced the shift back to home nursing far more than any of the rhetoric: infant mortality was strikingly high when babies were not nursed by their own mothers. Still, the rhetoric helped keep new mothers screwed firmly to their purpose and babies screwed firmly to theirs. Doctors published pamphlets on the benefits of nursing one's own children, and even the *philosophes* argued in favor of the mother/child bonding occasioned by breast-feeding. One of the more famous Enlightenment thinkers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, took up the theme in his *Émile* (1762). Of course, in Rousseau's case, it is far better to trust the tale than the teller: Rousseau and his mistress, Thérèse Levasseur, abandoned all five of their children to the Foundling Hospital.

Nevertheless, by the time of the French Revolution, breast-feeding had become virtually a political imperative. For example, only women who breast-fed their own babies were eligible for government assistance. In art, bare breasted women became the symbol of the new French

Republic. Perhaps the most famous of these images is Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, which depicts a bare-torsoed Liberty, French colors held high, leading her people to victory. From the eighteenth century on, Yalom argues, the breast has served as a potent political icon, and the evidence supports her claim. A famous slogan of twentieth-century America goes, "A chicken in every pot and a pot in every kitchen." A similar slogan for eighteenth-century France might have been, "A nipple in every mouth, and milk in every nipple!"

Fast forward to World War II. Big breasts have become a big part of the American war effort. Think of the busty dames whose painted figures graced the fuselage of many an American fighter plane, dames who bore names like "Miss Laid" with a perky grin. It was the era of the "pinup girl" for soldiers, and those girls—like Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth—were chesty chicks. Ample breasts apparently spurred male valor, even as the maternal breast—symbolizing love, nurturance, intimacy—reminded them of what they were fighting for. In any event, throughout the forties and fifties, the ideal female landscape boasted twin peaks in its northern latitudes.

And as women donned their bullet bras in the bedroom, the ideas of Sigmund Freud gained currency on the couch. As Ms. Yalom wittily puts it, "Freud always acknowledged the significance of the breast, without ceding an inch of penis." But Ms. Yalom knows an orally-fixated guy when she sees one. In the fifth chapter, "The Psychological Breast," Yalom (finally) begins to speak in her own voice and that voice is not just feminist, but humorous. One of my favorite passages in the book occurs on pages 152–153 when Yalom spoofs Freud's "penis-envy" theories with her own "breast-envy" theory.

From the moment that [a boy] is attached to the mother's breast, he cannot get enough of it. . . . As the little boy advances toward puberty, he harbors the fantasy that the breast will one day be restored to him. Unconsciously, he believes that he, too, like his sisters, will develop breasts in adolescence. When this does not happen, he feels seriously wronged. He holds his mother responsible for his defective chest. . . . He feels hollow and inferior to his sisters, with their bulging breasts. . . . Till the end of his days, the female breast will inspire in him both a desire for ownership and a rage at his own shortcomings in not developing breasts himself.

The spoof goes on and, through my giggles, I realized that Yalom's feminist Freud is every bit as plausible as the Viennese patriarch we all know and (some of us) love.

For those historians of fashion who are interested in the changes in women's undergarments, Yalom documents the transition from corsets to brassieres that occurred early in this century. The bra as we have come to know it was invented by a New York deb, Mary Phelps Jacob.

Refusing to wear a heavy corset to an evening dance, Mary whipped up a little chest covering out of two handkerchiefs and a pink ribbon. She patented her design in 1914. Those patent rights, which she later sold to the Warner Corset Company for \$1,500, were ultimately valued at around fifteen million. At any rate, it took the independent thinking of an upper-class young American finally to free the breasts from the prison of the corset. However, in Jacob's airy design, the freed breasts continued to flounder a bit: "Like prisoners newly released from jail, breasts went through a period of non-support and indecision before finding a home in truly functional brassieres."

By the 1930s, they had found the Maiden Form support bra. During this decade, the dyad of bra and underpants became the standard undergirding for most American women, and so it has remained—with the exception of a handful of years in the late sixties and early seventies when women cast off their bras in favor of greater social, political, and physical freedom. By the late 1970s, however, free-swinging breasts posed a painful problem for athletic women. Solution: the invention of sport bras.

Victoria's Secret opened its first stores in 1982 and sexy lingerie, including highly feminine brassieres, finally returned to the marketplace . . . and women's bodies. By the end of the eighties, the breast-enlargement business was booming and many women purchased "perfect" breasts to accent their sexy brassieres. The first warning signals that silicone implants might be unsafe did nothing to slow the breast-augmentation business. Not until 1994 did the Food and Drug Administration succeed in banning the implants, though not the desire to have them.

According to Yalom, many American women truly hate their breasts, their bodies, because they don't feel they conform to the media's ideal of a slim but large-breasted female figure. Such a figure, goes the reasoning, would be most likely to attract both male admiration and sexual desire. "After all, sex in the late twentieth century has been hyped into the greatest human good. . . . Increasingly, the pursuit of happiness [has become], for many Americans, the pursuit of sexual happiness *tout court*." And, to aid the pursuers—males as well as females—the cosmetic surgery industry has come up with breast augmentations and penile enlargements. "Setting aside health issues, breast and penile augmentations are sad admissions of our failure to relate to one another as full human beings." Instead, we've been reduced to so many breasts and penises, so many private "parts." Nothing whole will come of this, but Yalom has highlighted a striking phenomenon of our time and culture, albeit a depressing one. In this case, more is less.

As it rolls into our own era, Yalom's history of the breast gathers steam. At last, the author is speaking clearly in an "I" voice and claiming her opinions as her own. I found her thoughts on pornography particularly compelling. She tells us where she stands: "Like other people who consider themselves tolerant, I am not generally offended by

sexually explicit material. . . . To commodify body parts as sexual objects may be repugnant, but it is not, in and of itself, pornographic.” Yalom then defines pornography as “the combination of sex and violence inflicted on a person, who is usually female, by another person, who is usually male.” She distinguishes between erotica and pornography in this manner: erotica does not harm the persons involved; pornography does. “There is, indeed, a gray area between erotica and pornography, but when a woman is represented in a sexual act that appears to have been forced upon her—when she is stripped nude, handcuffed, whipped, or raped—the face of pornography is unmistakable.”

Yalom’s research has led her to contemplate such periodicals as *Tit and Body Torture Photos*, a magazine devoted almost entirely to graphic portraits of breast mutilations. It’s clear that she’s seen the face of pornography in one of its ugliest expressions, so I believe her when she says, “It’s easy to defend pornography on the grounds of free speech when one has not really looked at it.” She quickly sums up the positions of pro- and anti-pornography feminists and then cuts to the heart of the matter: “The current national battle over pornography reflects the opposition between two dearly held American concepts of freedom: freedom of speech and freedom from fear. In the climate of violence that prevails in the United States, many people, including this author, are convinced that uncontrolled pornography, like uncontrolled arms, undermines that second freedom. . . . Pornography . . . should not be able to flourish under the banner of free speech.” As someone who has always defended pornography on exactly those grounds, Yalom’s conviction gave me pause. After all, I haven’t seen the kind of sadistic hard-core pornography that she’s talking about. Perhaps she’s right and I should look at it before I defend it under the banner of free speech. Maybe we *all* should who advance that argument.

No history of a body part can be complete without a medical history, and Yalom gives readers a chapter on “The Medical Breast.” Insofar as breast cancer is one of the primary killers of women today—one in every nine women in America contracts it—I read this chapter with anxious attention. Indeed, my left breast ached throughout the chapter, as if in sympathetic response to the many historical women who figured here having their breasts lopped off or leached or lathered with burnt lime. Before the cancer killed them, many women had to undergo additional tortures inflicted on them by clueless quacks.

A few women, however, survived their bouts with cancer, and the English writer Fanny Burney was one. Still, I positively squirmed reading her firsthand account of her own mastectomy in October 1811. Before going under the knife, Burney penned a few lines to her husband, the Frenchman d’Arblay, and her son Alex. She then downed the potent anesthetic of *one* glass of wine, climbed upon a bed set up in her living room, and the operation began. With nothing but a transparent cambric handkerchief placed over her face, Burney could see it all if she chose.

Instead, she closed her eyes and underwent the most excruciating twenty minutes of her life.

When the dreadful steel was plunged into the breast—cutting through veins—arteries—flesh—nerves—I needed no injunctions not to restrain my cries. I began a scream that lasted unintermittingly during the whole time of the incision—& I almost marvel that it rings not in my Ears still! so excruciating was the agony. When the wound was made, & the instrument was withdrawn, the pain seemed undiminished, for the air that suddenly rushed into those delicate parts felt like a mass of minute but sharp and forked poniards, that were tearing the edges of the wound.

Despite hearing—and feeling—the knife scraping her breastbone, despite the “utterly speechless torture” of the operation, Fanny Burney was lucky enough to live to tell about it. She survived her mastectomy by thirty years, a rarity before the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, not until the second half of that century were anesthesia and antiseptics added to the practice of surgery.

Of course, some contemporary commentators think our current treatments of breast cancer are not much better than the obsolete ones; Dr. Susan Love describes them pithily as “slash, poison, and burn.” And poets continue to write about the breast, though now the poets aren’t lovestruck Renaissance men, but women who have experienced the joys and tragedies of their own breasts. Subjective breast poetry as opposed to objectifying breast poetry. Bereft breast poetry often, as in the case of the many poems by women about their mastectomies, about what remains and what doesn’t. Adrienne Rich speaks of a friend who had lost her breasts to cancer: “I want to touch my fingers / to where your breasts had been / but we never did such things.”

The real value of Yalom’s *History of the Breast* may be that it can help us to do such things—to see our breasts as parts of our bodies, to love our bodies whether they are whole or scarred, fat or thin, beautiful or otherwise. Although I was initially put off by the theoretical framework of this breast history, by its focus on a segment rather than a whole, the book ultimately becomes much more than the reiterated sum of one part. The last chapters, in particular, rise above contemporary specialization and Marxist ideology into something almost transcendent: Yalom helps readers see that *we* are far more than the sum of our parts, too. For this alone, *A History of the Breast* is a laudable book.

HAROLD FROMM

The Mindless Cunning of Dreams

IN ATTEMPTING TO WRITE ABOUT DREAMS, Bert O. States has embarked on an almost thankless task, since it is hard to know what would constitute success in such an undertaking. He himself recognizes what he has gotten himself into when he remarks that “someday someone will tell us in clear terms that the purpose of the dream is such-and-such, and we will cry out a collective ‘Of course! Why didn’t we see that before?’” Like attempts to explain consciousness or the beginnings of the universe or why there is a universe at all rather than nothing, “reflections on dreams and dreaming” (to use States’s subtitle) start out—and end up—with a heavy load of indeterminacy.

*Seeing in the Dark*¹ is a book both easy/clear and difficult/obscure. It is “easy” because the chapters are all built around a central thesis *contra* Freud that is reiterated again and again and because the prose is so limpid, idiomatic, graceful, and fluent, so remarkably free of academic bombast (States is a retired literature professor from UC Santa Barbara) and so minimally technical in its vocabulary. But it’s also difficult insofar as it is a series of disorderly reflections rather than a rigorously worked out thesis cum empirical support. Making use of anecdote, personal experience, and lots of very sharp aperçus, the book’s chapters, as States observes, could probably be read in any order you please. This informality detracts from a focus that might have served to “get it all together,” with the result that the reader is hard pressed to digest and recall the numerous obiter dicta on which the exposition depends.

States is keenly aware of the liabilities of his labor and tells us right off that the object of his inquiry does not even exist! There’s no artifact to be observed, no data that can be surely ascertained, shared, or reproduced, so that any summary of a dream (assuming that one can even recall it) is bound to be itself a problematic narrative. In asking why we dream at all, traditional theories (like those of Freud) assume that dreams *have* a meaning and that this meaning stems from repression or is an attempt to organize experience or relieve emotional stress. But States wants to reject “meaning” theories insofar as they presuppose an internal but clever “unconscious” consciousness that organizes experience before it is experienced by our reflective but somewhat dimwitted “conscious” consciousness. Like Freud’s censor who disguises the data of

¹ SEEING IN THE DARK: Reflections on Dreams and Dreaming, by Bert O. States. Yale University Press. \$32.50.

dreams to make them more palatable (but what's the point of a disguise that we can't see through or fathom, States asks), "meaning" theories presuppose some little guy who is operating inside unbeknownst to us, disposing all of our chaotic daily sensations and perceptions into neat little cubbyholes and plots. This leaves us with the new task of trying to explain who this little guy is and how come he knows so much that we ourselves are stupidly unaware of. States finds this approach unrewarding and suggests instead that just as the body is constantly metabolizing and is dead when it stops, so the brain is constantly thinking and is dead when *it* stops. Thoughts, then, are being produced twenty-four hours a day and the thoughts of dreams are not radically dissimilar to the chaotic thoughts of our waking stream of consciousness. Like the enchained thoughts of daytime activity, dreams are propelled by an almost uncontrollable narrativity. If all of our life is a story with some sort of connections, then the task for dream theorists would be to explain the peculiar logic of the narrativity of our thoughts during sleep—and this would have to be a logic devoid of "meaning."

In rejecting a dream-theory depending on "meaning," States is attracted to Richard Dawkins' ideas of genes and memes: the selfish gene whose non-intentional "aim" is simply to exist and reproduce with no end or telos and the meme (or unit of meaning or cultural transmission) that contributes to the storehouse of thoughts from which we make selections that comprise our thinking stream of consciousness. "In sum: blind advances in gene construction in turn prepare the organism for corresponding advances in meme or motive orientation—blind motion thus leading to directed action." Dreams, he continues, "are selfish, blind, mental acts that capitalize on the strongest materials they cast up in their mini-evolutions. In short, dreams are 'up to' nothing." What makes *them* selfish is that they realize themselves without concern for the benefit of the dreamer. Dreaming, then, is a mindless process, an involuntary accumulation of stuff, like Darwinian evolution, which does not evolve for the benefit of the individual but is, rather, a form of free play for itself. This, of course, as States more than once reminds us, is a pretty sharp slap in the face of conventional theories about dreams as meaningful stories of aspects of ourselves that *really* matter. The intelligence of dreams is the intelligence of the interpreters of dreams and is not to be found in any internal coherence of the dreams themselves. Dreams "don't have intentions and they don't have minds of their own that set tasks, and they aren't privy to intellectual skills or intuitions denied to the waking brain. They are thought processors without motives."

If this is the case, then how can dreams acquire plots or continuity of imagery if nobody is authoring them, nobody planning them out in advance of their unfolding? States subscribes to the theory of "day residue," that the brain is materially filled with image content all day long that can be drawn upon at night by a somewhat arbitrary associationism. It's not meaning but a logic of association that has more to do

with neurons than with knowing. When a dream “produces a character with a saw, for whatever reason, the consequent event will probably have something to do with cutting wood, and so on.” Yet States does not want brain images to be considered static, virtual, fixed objects, but to be implicated in a chemically dynamic web of past, present, and future, “an interlocking of retentions and associations.” The dream is “a spectacle of consciousness in flux,” a self-organizing process for which meaning is not a “cause” but an *ex post facto* legitimization.

We all know how random and crazy dreams tend to be, how someone—to use an example from States—can be Harrison Ford and somebody else at the same time. What, he wonders, if these baffling incoherencies were not the exhalations of obscure profundities of our conscious lives that require shrinks to decipher but simply the contingencies of jostling images from our daily lives? “There are groups of ‘nearby things’ (including the whole day residue waiting in line for ‘processing’) that swarm together by virtue of the theme of the dream in progress.” One metaphor gives way to another in a “metonymic chain” drawn from the contents of consciousness, a handsaw pulling up images of wood, sawdust, carpenters, etc., that just happen to be lying around. “A metaphor or image or sound contains, contiguously, potentially, metonymically, *all of its kindred*, and it wants only a provocative context in order to give birth.” This seems very plausible to me, except for the fact that “kindred” and relation in general are hard to dissociate from meaning, from intelligibility, which in turn is apt to lead us back through an infinite regress in which an understanding choreographer has to be posited behind each layer of “association.” In eliminating intentionality from dreams (the little guy inside), States adopts the view that dreams *create* meaning and that this meaning is relevant to the life of the dreamer “because the dreamer usually dreams in personal terms—that is, from the metonymic holdings of a unique memory.” This created meaning, however, derives from the tendency of the mind to make sense of all experience, to select and eliminate data in order to produce a coherent narrative, a coherence that is not the fruit of, say, an Oedipus complex but of a literary critic, so to speak, for whom the text is the remembered content of a series of ad hoc images we refer to as the dreamwork.

Most of the cherished symbolic richness of Freudianism is thereby dashed to pieces: “How is it possible that a symbolically naive dreamer, someone who hasn’t heard that water is a symbol of interuterine [intrauterine?] life, or flying a symbol of sexual excitement, can conjure a symbol that would be unrecognizable as such if he or she were confronted by it in waking life?” States wants to eliminate symbolism altogether from the interpretation of dreams. Like words in a text, “images are the music of thought played by the dreaming brain on the organ of memory, and a single image means no more (or less) than a D flat ‘means’ out of the flow of a unique musical composition.” In a wonderful passage about the need to urinate during the middle of the night, States writes:

Here is a common dream experience I have a half-dozen times a month: in my dream I become aware of an urgent need to micturate (as Freud would say), a scenario that was signaled up from the bladder. I probably had this urge before the dream began, but it invariably finds its way into a dream, so I suppose my urinary apparatus, having failed to get my attention in deep sleep, simply waits for the onset of an REM episode. But it is the one dependable thing I can say about dreams: when I have to “go,” the dream’s plot will directly reflect the somatic urgency and the dream will go through some variation of the Tedious Search for a Bathroom—invariably unsuccessful. And at some point, without fail, I will get out of bed and put an end to the scenario—and its incentive.

States’s comment on this is incisive: “Surely we have here an unequivocal, unmistakable cause-and-effect situation that has nothing to do (at this point at least) with infantile urethral eroticism.” Or even more sharply: “Sometimes a pee is just a pee.”

The last quarter of *Seeing in the Dark* looks into the relationship between dreaming and writing, between the involuntary fictions of dreams and the voluntary ones of poetry and novels. Is poetry, he asks, voluntary dreaming? After all, when one dreams, one is somehow inside and outside the dream at the same time, experiencing what seems to be a cast of characters, a causal logic, an imitation of daily life that is “convincing” while it takes place. Where the devil does it all come from? And when an author creates a narrative fiction (and nonfiction as well, I might add), we writer-types often report that the work seems to write itself as if transmitted from on high by what used to be called a muse or divine inspiration, as in Milton invoking God or Yeats taking dictation from his spooks. Activity and passivity combine to produce the final product. “The dreamer ‘writes’ the dream as it comes within a field of limited possibilities but does not realize that he or she is doing the writing.” These limited possibilities derive from the contingencies of memory, of associating images, bodily imperatives, room temperature, interruptions, experiences of the day, preoccupations, etc., that also influence the course of literary composition. States, however, invites puzzlement when he suggests that dreams (and, by extension, creative writing) are a cross between socially given scripts (i.e., the basic plots of all narratives, presumably produced by instinctive human needs) and the ad hoc materials of dreaming and inspiration, for if dreams are guided or molded by “scripts,” it would be hard to regard them as intrinsically meaningless, as not being the products of an organizing consciousness somehow residing under the dreaming and writing.

Although limited as theory by the random quality of its discourse and its disorderly structure, this is a well-written and genial book filled with insights into both the nature of dreams and the nature of creativity.

TOM WILHELMUS

Hopperesque

ONE OF THE SATISFACTIONS OF FICTION is its ability to document the world—to provide the details which fix a particular moment firmly in history and in our minds. Another is to simplify, to provide not the world as it is but as it exists through the lens of an idea. I think about these things while I'm reading, but the inspiration for such thoughts probably has less to do with books and more to do with painting. Why is Edward Hopper my (and apparently America's) favorite painter? His works are realistic, to be sure, full of place, experience, anecdote. His figures are full of human qualities and frailties, loneliness, self-dramatization, self-absorption, often a kind of desperate and private yearning. But they are never fully real. They are a little too monumental perhaps, a little too arranged, and certainly dominated by their surroundings. And for all their documentary quality, the paintings are also exercises in abstraction, drawing attention to volume, shape, light—above all light, that affords the illusion of clarity despite the essential mysteriousness of Hopper's subjects. If there is a lesson in this, it is that we seem to prefer, Americans especially seem to prefer, paintings—and I think narratives—which are real but not too real, experiences shaped in the direction of an abstract idea, one that takes on the appearance of an answer without perhaps really getting there.

A striking example of what I mean occurs in Philip Roth's new novel, *American Pastoral*,¹ which seeks to balance experiences and abstractions in a work which documents, often in excruciating detail, the period in American history from the years immediately following World War II to the 1990s, years coinciding with the author's own experience but portrayed in a text more interested in exploring what went wrong in the American dream rather than the personal and psychological *angst* which is more often the point of his fiction.

To be sure Roth, now in his seventies, has lost none of his ferocity and style. But in *American Pastoral*, he has chosen to write about a character, Seymour (Swede) Levov who exemplifies a significant fifties version of an American ideal. At the beginning of the novel Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's well-known literary alter ego, meets the Swede for the first time in nearly half a century since high school and finds he is still the emblem of perfection he remembered—handsome, blond, wealthy, self-assured, a man who had seemed only to build on his reputation in the

¹ AMERICAN PASTORAL, by Philip Roth. Houghton Mifflin. \$26.00.

intervening years. After high school, where he was a heroic sports figure, the Swede had joined the marines, married Miss New Jersey of 1949, and passing up a career in baseball, had become a successful manufacturer, moving from the old Weequahic Jewish neighborhood in Newark into a rambling, colonial stone house in the town of Old Rimrock out in the New Jersey countryside. Heroically successful and maddeningly modest, the Swede simply seems ideal. For this reason, everything about him seems uninteresting to Zuckerman. In his mind, it was the Swede's curse, "To respect everything one is supposed to respect; to protest nothing; never to be inconvenienced by self-distrust; never to be enmeshed in obsession, tortured by incapacity, poisoned by resentment, driven by anger." His life is merely perfection, lacking conflict, depth, interest, a life that just kept unraveling, according to Zuckerman, "like a ball of fluffy yarn." Nonetheless, when Zuckerman discovers two weeks later that the Swede has died and that his life, in fact, had been filled with tragedy, the novelist is compelled to explain to himself how he could have failed to see even a clue of the Swede's distress.

The story which follows, then, is Zuckerman's imaginative reconstruction of the Swede's past, a psychodrama predicated at least in part on Zuckerman's egotistical need to explain how he could have been so unobservant. Along the way, however, it becomes an exploration not merely of the Swede's tragedy but also America's tragedy in the late twentieth century, a fact Roth seeks to capture not only in the book's title but also in the titles of its three principal sections—"Paradise Remembered," "The Fall," and "Paradise Lost."

A compulsively ironizing novelist, Roth nonetheless treats the Swede sympathetically, portraying him as a product of his immigrant father's drive for success, of the self-assurance instilled in the immediate postwar generation, and of the Jewish community's need to become assimilated and established. Like many such heroes, he is the unconscious expression of collective need. He has been bright and beautiful and successful. He has married the ideal girl and has worked hard at his business. Indeed, some of the most persuasive passages in the book detail the Swede's pride in his career and his extensive knowledge as a glove manufacturer in Newark, and what both have meant not only to the Swede himself and to his family but also to the community and his employees. Moreover, he has been thoughtful and sensitive. He has sensed his wife's embarrassment in being thought of merely as a beauty queen and has fostered her desire to have a business of her own. He has raised his daughter in the best circumstances and to the best of his ability. He is accustomed to working hard and doing what's right. And when downtown Newark falls prey to urban violence and destruction, his is the last business to relocate. He was a little bit stupid and a little bit unprepared for what eventually happened during the turmoil of the sixties. But weren't we all? And how could we condemn this member of the establishment for that? Roth's powerful exculpation of the Swede is

remarkable especially considering the manner in which he has treated such persons in the past.

When the Swede's sixteen-year-old daughter rebels in protest against the war in Vietnam (but, even the Swede and his wife were against the war), she precipitates the actions that will destroy all his certainties. And even then it seems impossible to say that what the Swede wanted out of life was wrong. He has not been a neglectful parent and seems more victim than victimizer of his rebellious child. In short, we like the Swede and shudder at the destruction he endures. Curiously, however, we feel very much the same about his daughter. Although she is both destructive and bizarre, she is also simply an extension of every sixties parent's nightmare of an inexplicable and rebellious child. Indeed, Roth deals with all of his characters—the suburbanite sexual libertine, the academic nihilist, the ineffectual and deceitful therapist, the demanding father, the Swede's outrageous brother as well as the Swede, his daughter, and his wife—as victims of a complex, historical moment. Only once or twice in the creation of a character named Rita Cohen does Roth flirt with an outright evil, or perhaps a meaninglessness, that is truly appalling.

It is conceivable that what happened to all of us in the sixties was something for which no one—or perhaps everyone—is to blame. In the end, it is the abstract solution, the retreat into conspiracy or myth, that it seems Roth wishes particularly to avoid. Therefore, when the book ends it is without a conclusion at a summer dinner party where all the issues are raised, seem endlessly debated, and never resolved. The party is a masterful stroke by a major novelist, a chic social gathering but also hateful, destroying all illusions, rich in detail and analysis, and refusing to supply the comforting answer which most readers undoubtedly hope for but which, under the circumstances, it would be too much to expect.

If Roth refuses to provide us with an answer in the form of a single abstract idea, the next novel deals more explicitly with an interlocking complex of ideas, and the dangers of taking them too far. *The Madhouse Nudes*,² a first novel (a portion of which was published in this magazine) by prizewinning poet and essayist Robert Schultz, arranges itself around an exposition of the by-now familiar awareness—the “semiotic” awareness—of what has come to be known as “the male gaze.”

That men have treated women as objects simply by the manner in which they cause them to be represented visually is the accepted dogma of our times. The man who buys the painting or the ticket to the movie theater, who pays for the dress or the fashion magazine and whose gaze must, therefore, be satisfied if sales are to continue, tacitly exploits women by forcing them to live according to his visual expectations. Our sensitivity to these issues shows up in our commentary upon cultural phenomena as disparate as the worlds of fashion, cosmetics, and art

² THE MADHOUSE NUDES, by Robert Schultz. Simon & Schuster. \$22.00.

history, and in the aggrieved cry of feminism, shrill though it may sometimes strike us. To his credit Schultz, who teaches at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, does not preach at us about these ideas but rather shows how they may and may not be true when they are seen through the actions of a single, fictional personage caught up in a particular set of circumstances.

John Ordway, a young painter specializing in the tradition of the female nude, has moved with his girlfriend from New York City to the unlikely town of Delphi, Iowa to pursue his work cheaply and without distractions. What appears to be a fairly simple, uncomplicated decision, however, engages him in events which—in this rather calm, understated novel—will raise fundamental questions about the nature and “business” of art and its relation to the self and others, especially those we love and live among.

At first Ordway encounters the suspicion and skepticism he might have expected in a small Midwestern town miles, and it seems generations, away from New York City. Among the majority of townspeople sexuality itself is wrong, especially when fostered by reprehensible “artist” types, not merely because it invites licentious behavior but also because it threatens the underlying stability of the community. The women Ordway hires as models are considered tramps by his neighbors although, in fact, he treats them (at least superficially) merely as tools in his artist’s supply kit. Soon, however, Ordway himself begins to feel an estrangement from his girlfriend caused not so much by his choice of subject matter as by some underlying insensitivity on his part, some indifference to her growth and prospects as an artist as well as his own “objectification” of things as an artist. Slowly we realize (though he does not) that Ordway has denied his own subjectivity while engaged in the production of impersonal art objects.

When his girlfriend leaves him, he breaks down, burns one of his important new canvases, and winds up in a local convalescent facility, in counselling, and dependent on antidepressant drugs. Although the source of his confusion is never made explicit, the results of his treatment—especially his introduction to a caring, supportive community in the town—will suggest the source of his difficulties and will eventually point a way out, though not until things grow a good deal worse. As the weeks progress, he cannot paint and must take a menial job in a local social service agency. Also, he is accused of an assault on one of his former models, a charge others find credible because of the sexually charged atmosphere his work has created in the town. Clearly Ordway’s problem, symbolized in his psychological breakdown, originates in his inability to deal with others (his girlfriend, his models) as people and in the energy it takes to sublimate his own erotic fears and desires and turn them into art. Nor does he suspect the link that exists between sophisticated voyeurism and the sale of his paintings in New York.

Up to a point the “male gaze” theory suggests what is wrong with

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Ordway and some of the difficulties he must overcome. Nonetheless, like any theory it oversimplifies the complex needs and desires that truly characterize human sexual relationships, a topic on which Schultz has written in the Autumn 1995 issue of this magazine. In its latter half, *The Madhouse Nudes* turns from simply an analysis of Ordway's problem and attempts to suggest a cure. It turns out, for instance, that his exoneration occurs simultaneously with a new aesthetic outlook and a new relationship, one which suggests a need for mutuality and caring, for a mature sexuality which includes respect for one's partner and love, and for an approach to painting that creates a new kind of relation between the painter and a non-"objectified" subject, all within a context of respect for others and for community. The effect of this emerging awareness is cumulative and leads to the well-rounded conclusion of this surprisingly complete first novel.

The Madhouse Nudes avoids becoming a theoretical novel by bringing into the discussion a "real" (if fictional) set of complications. In a similar manner, Frederick Busch's new novel *Girls*³ interests me by the manner in which it eludes simple classification as a work of detective fiction. Busch, who teaches at Colgate University and has been acting director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, has won or been nominated for most of the important awards available in fiction in this country. Perhaps it is the speculative turn of mind appropriate to a professor that has urged him to take on the detective genre in his eighteenth work of fiction. But if that is so, he has not spared the professors in undertaking this new task. It is the degree to which he can twist the familiar abstraction of the detective genre and still remain true to its basic characteristics that is the basis of his success.

The detective in this novel, for example, is not really a detective at all but rather a security guard, named Jack, a veteran and ex-M.P. who works at an upstate New York college. Cast as a caregiver to a lot of overprivileged students and, more often than not, patronized by a similarly snotty group of professors (his English professor has recently returned a story marked with a D but with the comment that Jack is "not an unintelligent writer"), Jack has been especially sensitized to this role by the recent death of a daughter, a tragedy with which he and his wife Fanny, an emergency-room nurse, are desperately trying to come to terms. Complicating his delicate sense of balance are the many desperate victims that surround Jack in his work. These include not only students preyed on by other students, faculty members, and touring drug dealers but also the increasing number of young girls in the area—who have either run away or been kidnapped—whose faces keep showing up on milk cartons and bulletin boards Jack keeps running into. Like any tough-guy detective, Jack is emotionally damaged. His marriage is on the rocks, and he himself is being pursued by one of the

³ *GIRLS*, by Frederick Busch. Harmony Books. \$23.00.

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female faculty members. Also, he is prone to violent outbursts of anger and self-pity. Still, he is basically honest and “not an unintelligent” protagonist whose true, loyal companion is his dog.

In this manner, Busch has created the atmosphere of violence, guilt, sex, and moral ambivalence characteristic of detective fiction but he has done so not down the mean streets of some film noir inner city but rather in an icy landscape in upstate New York. Like detective fiction, too, the novel contains scenes that are oddly domesticated and full of handy practical advice like what to cook, how to build (or tear down) a wall, and how to find your way home if you get lost while cross-country skiing. But the scenes and the emotions themselves are too finely observed, the style too richly expressed (with none of the “tough-guy” talk that is the legacy of Chandler and Spillane), events too morally ambivalent, and the damage to the many girls too “real” for genuine genre fiction. The plot of the novel centers principally on Jack’s efforts to find one victim among the many, the fourteen-year-old daughter of a local minister and his wife. But Busch has managed to take the search for Janice Tanner to a new level of grief and despair with implications more frightening than normal detective fiction (a comforting genre after all) can tolerate. In this manner the play between real and ideal takes on a whole new meaning.

When one turns from novels to short stories this kind of play is hard to accommodate. Characteristically, short stories must allude more indirectly to experiences, and there is less time for ideas to grow out of them. Stories must suggest where novels may explore in detail, and there is a greater possibility of failure. One of the more successful recent collections in this regard, *The Destiny of Nathalie X and Other Stories*⁴ by Londoner William Boyd, is a stylish grouping of eleven pieces each of which is to some degree a mental exercise illustrating Boyd’s facility with a variety of artistic alternatives—stylistic, theoretical, historical, fashionable, or intellectual—a range that is at once his strength as well as occasionally his weakness. For example, a story about Hollywood, where everyone has “a theory about this town,” may exist side-by-side with a story whose protagonist is Ludwig Wittgenstein. A story may be based on a quotation from Cyril Connolly’s journal or on a style of music from Brazil. Others may be based on lunch menus, on German design schools of the thirties or on the letter “N.” It’s hard to imagine a wider range of allusion to both ideas and to the eccentric, telling detail than is to be found in this collection of short stories. In many ways, it argues that Boyd is a complete artist and practitioner of the craft of fiction—knowledgeable, fluid, inquisitive, intellectually far-reaching, the nearest inheritor of Donald Barthelme but without the latter’s existentialist panache. Always playful, Boyd mixes freely his sizable erudition and taste for intellectual abstraction, with a gaudy disrespect for the real.

⁴ THE DESTINY OF NATHALIE X AND OTHER STORIES, by William Boyd. Alfred A. Knopf. \$22.00.

In a more traditional vein, a debut collection, *The Secrets of a Fire King*,⁵ by Kim Edwards, is the work of a thoughtful writer with an elegant style and a similarly wide range of cultural, artistic, and intellectual interests.

Six of her eleven stories employ insights derived from five years Edwards spent teaching and traveling in Asia. In one a woman's father, in an oppressively Muslim country, is obsessed with the repetition of ancestral traits within members of his current family. Destroyed as a person and forced to live another person's identity, the daughter nonetheless bides her time before exacting a painful retribution. Another investigates the clash of values inherent in an exogamous marriage between an American veteran and a young Asian woman. A third, "The Invitation," explores the difference between Westerners who go to Asia for personal gain and those who actually try to understand the people they are visiting among. "Gold," an almost Conradian story, shows how the discovery of gold obsesses a young man who dreams of a fuller life only to see those dreams destroyed. Another, "Sky Juice," tries to capture the despair of a young Asian woman who tries to escape poverty through prostitution and then through a loveless marriage to a Western businessman. "Rat Stories" explores the length to which a young husband, who directs agricultural projects in the Third World, will go to see that his funding is renewed. Throughout, these stories are not merely exotic but also intelligent and sympathetic in understanding the cultural differences between East and West.

The remaining stories, however, are remarkable for the range of their interests and styles. One is told by Marie Curie's maid and expresses the wonder, and ultimately the tragedy, she experiences in handling the radioactive pitchblend in Mme. Curie's laboratory. Another, about defeated dreams and declining abilities among circus acrobats, centers amusingly on the metaphor of trying to perform sexual intercourse while balancing on your head. Another uses skydiving as a metaphor for learning self-sufficiency and freedom in a world in which no values are certain. And the title story, "The Secrets of a Fire King," reminiscent of O'Neill or Inge, is perhaps all metaphor, reproducing the themes of belief, greed, passion, the transfer of secret knowledge, and betrayal among a traveling troupe of tent evangelists. This interest in the easy credulity of the crowd crops up also in the final story, "The Story of My Life," about a young girl whose mother uses her in the pro-life war against abortion doctors. Rich in detail and at home with abstract ideas, Kim Edwards' stories mark an impressive beginning for a talented new storyteller.

⁵ THE SECRETS OF A FIRE KING, by Kim Edwards. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. \$23.00.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GEORGE WATSON, who is a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, is the author of *Politics and Literature in Modern Britain and British Literature since 1945* (St. Martin's). He has been a visiting professor of English at New York University and at the University of Georgia. . . . BERT O. STATES has just retired from teaching and devotes full time to writing. His most recent book, *Seeing in the Dark*, is reviewed in this issue. . . . DAVID MASON's most recent books are *The Country I Remember* and *Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism*. . . . BARBARA HAAS trains writers to conduct workshop sessions with at-risk youth in central Iowa. She has received an NEA Fellowship for fiction and is on the Creative Writing faculty at Iowa State University. . . . SYDNEY LEA's sixth book of poems, a new and selected volume, *To the Bone*, is available from the University of Illinois Press. . . . *Nombres et poussière*, a selection of LOUIS SIMPSON's poems in French translation by Serge Fauchereau, has recently been published by Atelier La Feugraie, Paris. Simpson's *Modern Poets of France: A Bilingual Anthology*, is scheduled for publication by Story Line Press. . . . KAREN WILKIN's monograph, *Georges Braque*, was published by Abbeville Press in 1991.

DICK ALLEN is the author of *Ode to the Cold War: Poems New and Selected*, which was published by Sarabande Books in March 1997. . . . TIMOTHY MURPHY's first full-length collection, *The Deed of Gift*, will be published by Story Line Press early in 1998. . . . JEFFREY FRANKLIN is an Assistant Professor of Victorian Literature at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. . . . NINA BOGIN lives in eastern France and is the author of a book of poems, *In the North* (Graywolf Press). . . . JOHN LOUGHERY's study of gay life in twentieth-century America will be published next year by Henry Holt and Company. . . . BERT CARDULLO is the co-author of *The Crommelynck Mystery: The Life and Work of a Belgian Playwright* and the editor of *The Theater of Fernand Crommelynck*, both forthcoming in 1998 from Susquehanna University Press. . . . SUSAN BALÉE appears in "History through Literature," a twelve-part video series aimed at high school and college students, to be released in spring of 1998. . . . TOM WILHELMUS is co-director of the Ropewalk Writers Retreat, University of Southern Indiana, which will be celebrating its tenth anniversary next year.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

It was, I imagine, my mother (or my mother and sister ganging up on him) who convinced him [my father] one afternoon in my fifteenth year that it was his duty, and the proper time, to explain sex to me. So the two of us suddenly got in his blue Dodge, for no announced reason, and drove out the Indiana hill road, he silent and ominous, I simply curious about why we were out for a ride and *not* going to a store, and finally after a brief warm-up ("How old are you now, Buddy?"), he said something to the effect that I should be nice to girls. And I thought, *Here it comes!* And, within another sentence or so, without transition, he suddenly blurted out that I should keep my Jasper in my pants.

"You know what I mean?" he said. . . .

—Bert O. States, "My Slight Stoop: A Remembrance," p. 369.

We returned to the Grand Hôtel de l'Europe. Who would deny that it was grand? Forget the musty smell of the room that couldn't wait for you to leave. It was a grand hotel if you thought of the history of France . . . a château on the Loire, a painting by Chardin. It was grand in the fashion of Molière playing *Le Malade Imaginaire* as he was dying. And it wasn't just the grand hotel of France—it had catered to the nobility of Europe, and socialists too. It was the *Inferno* and a Beethoven quartet.

—Louis Simpson, "The Further Off from England," p. 422.

Braque is the docudrama writer's nightmare, an unflashy artist's artist who led a life of astonishing dullness: no familial resistance to his becoming a painter, no struggle for recognition, no flight to the South Seas, no severed ear, no discarded mistresses, no embittered heirs, no scandals, no revealing journals. Braque's childless marriage to Marcelle Lapré was by all accounts happy and lasted for half a century.

—Karen Wilkin, "Will Georges Braque Ever Get His Due?", p. 444.